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INSIDE

MONEY 10
GDP GROWTH LIKELY TO BE 6.3 PER CENT IN FY25, SAYS SBI REPORT



INDIA BLOC FALLS IN DELHI



RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Head of the Delhi Assembly elections, Opposition parties INDIA Bloc's rift widened as Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress (TMC) on Wednesday announced its support for the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). This comes after Uddhav Thackeray's Shiv Sena (UBT) and Akhilesh Yadav's Samajwadi Party (SP) too announced to support the AAP in the upcoming assembly polls in Delhi. This has sparked speculation of a significant rift within the alliance, particularly concerning the Congress party, which is running alone in the Delhi polls and finds itself isolated despite claiming leadership in the alliance.

All the four parties — AAP, Trinamool Congress, Samajwadi Party and Congress — are partners in the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) and had jointly fought the Lok Sabha elections last year. With major INDIA bloc allies supporting AAP, the Congress has found itself cornered in the three-way battle against the AAP and the BJP. The current situation fuels existing speculation about leadership within the INDIA Bloc. Mamata Banerjee has openly expressed her desire to lead the coalition, a move that has reportedly put pressure on the Congress party, who are seen by many as facing a leadership crisis. The support from both the SP and TMC appears to be a direct challenge to Congress's position. The support for AAP is particularly noteworthy since it appears to directly undermine Congress's election strategy. Sharad Pawar of the NCP and Lalu Prasad Yadav of the RJD have also publicly backed Banerjee's leadership ambitions, further intensifying pressure on Congress. SP chief Akhilesh Yadav declared his support for the AAP in the upcoming Delhi assembly elections, signaling a significant crack in the opposition's INDIA alliance. Kejriwal extended his gratitude to the former Uttar Pradesh CM.

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AAP, BJP workers crossfire over PM home, CM's mahal



Police and security personnel stand guard outside Prime Minister's official residence at Lok Kalyan Marg, in New Delhi. Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

After the announcement of Assembly polls, a high voltage political drama unfolded in Delhi as the showdown between the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) over the 'Sheesh Mahal' controversy. A group of AAP workers led by Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh and Delhi Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj tried to reach the Prime Minister's official residence on Lok Kalyan Marg, but were stopped by police en route. This was followed by an attempt to conduct a media tour of the Chief Minister's residence at 6 Flag Staff Road, Civil Lines which was also thwarted by the police. In its turn, the BJP also took media to the AB 17 Mathura Road bungalow allotted to Chief Minister Atishi to show that she already had a government residence and sought to know why she was asking for a separate bungalow. Sachdeva charged, "The AAP leaders are doing drama and trying to divert attention from the Sheesh corruption and irregularities

committed in the construction of Sheesh Mahal (6, Flagstaff Road, occupied by Arvind Kejriwal as chief minister). Why did they not think of showing the Sheesh Mahal earlier and now insist on a visit when the administration is bound by a model code of conduct?" In a veiled attack on AAP leaders, BJP national spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi, addressing a press conference, said their conduct was also an example of "political etiquette and ethics" being demolished. This shows the writing on the wall is clear to them that the AAP is losing the Delhi assembly polls, he said. Earlier, outside the Chief Minister's house, the AAP leaders engaged in a heated argument with the police and staged a dharna outside the 6 Flag Staff Road bungalow after being denied entry, which they had invited the media to tour with them in a bid to counter the BJP's 'Sheesh Mahal' jibes. Police set up barricades and deployed personnel in front of the bungalow, preventing the AAP leaders from entering the premises.

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Nagpur: Preparations underway at Meditrina Hospital for patients of Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV), a day after two suspected cases of the virus were reported from the city, in Nagpur, Maharashtra. PTI

No panic over HMPV, but vigilance increased

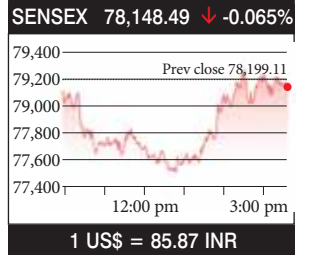
PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

As Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV) cases continue to rise, bringing the total to 11 so far amid growing concerns linked to a potential resurgence of respiratory illnesses from China, States are intensifying efforts to manage the outbreak, which is primarily affecting infants and young children. On Wednesday, a six-month-old baby tested positive for HMPV at Hiranandani Hospital in Mumbai's Powai. Out of the total cases reported so far, two were reported in Bengaluru, one in Gujarat, two in Chennai, three in Kolkata, and now three in Maharashtra. While the Centre has reassured the public that there is no need to panic-emphasising that HMPV is not a new pathogen and not causing a widespread outbreak-health departments in several states are taking no

chance. The Jammu and Kashmir health department has established a specialized ICU ward in Jammu to handle potential cases, while Uttarakhand has issued guidelines for the prevention of respiratory diseases like HMPV. Sunita Tamta, Director of Uttarakhand Medical Health and Family Welfare, described the HMPV as being similar to the flu virus. She urged citizens not to panic, emphasizing the importance of increased precautions. "If you experience flu-like symptoms, maintain distance and use a handkerchief or tissue while sneezing or coughing," she advised. Echoing similar concerns, Dr. Hamid Zargar, Medical Superintendent of Gandhinagar Government Hospital said, "we are not taking any chances and have prepared a special ICU ward to handle any eventuality. God forbid if a pandemic occurs, we are ready."

Continued on page 8

MARKETS



WEATHER

LUCKNOW
MAX 17.1°C(3-3)
MIN 10.6°C(+3-0)

DU's LSR, 14 others get bomb hoax threat calls

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

More than 15 educational institutions including Lady Shri Ram College across the national Capital received bomb threats, which later turned out to be hoaxes. Since May last year, more than 100 schools have been receiving bomb threats through mails. According to the police on Wednesday, more than 15 schools including Bal Bharati Public School in Ganga Ram, Laxman Public School in Hauz Khas, Fr. Agnel School in Gurgaon, Bluebells School in Kailash, Modern School in Vasant Vihar, Amity School in Saket, Salwan Public School in Mayur Vihar, G D Goenka school, Spring Bell Nursery School in West Patel Nagar, Tagore international in Amar Colony and Delhi Public School in East of Kailash among others. According to police sources, the mail was received from an e-mail id 'troisuns@gmail.com'. The content of the mail mentioned that since exams are going on in the schools, this will be the best time to strike and create maximum damage. The mail was received around 10:15 am, a senior police officer said, adding that after thorough checking it turned out to be hoax. "We received two different bomb threat calls from Lady Shri Ram College at 11.40 am. Another bomb threat call was received from Tagore International School in the East of Kailash area at 11.17 am," an official said. He said teams were immediately rushed to the site, but nothing suspicious was found. A dog squad and bomb disposal squad were part of the teams rushed to the spot, a police officer said. Since May last year, over 50 bomb threat emails have targeted not only schools but also hospitals, airports and airline companies in Delhi, but the police have yet to make any breakthroughs in these cases. The Delhi Police has been unable to crack the cases due to VPNs (Virtual Private Network) and proxy servers which acted as key barriers in solving cases and legal frameworks for obtaining information from these services are inadequate, leading to delays in investigations.

Continued on page 8

Google holes up Assam cops as criminals in Nagaland

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ GUWAHATI

A 16-member team of the Assam Police inadvertently strayed into Nagaland's Mokochung district during a raid while they were following directions on Google Maps, and was attacked by locals and held captive overnight. According to a senior official of Assam Police, the incident occurred on Tuesday night when a team of the Jorhat District Police was carrying out a raid to apprehend an accused. "It was a tea garden area, which was shown in Assam on Google Maps. However, it was actually inside Nagaland. The team went inside Nagaland in pursuit of the criminal due to confusion and misleading guidance on GPS," he said. The locals thought the Assam Police team to be some miscreants carrying sophisticated arms and detained them, he said. "Of the 16 personnel, only three were in uniform and the rest were in civil dress. This also led to confusion among the locals. They also attacked the team and one of our personnel was injured," he added.



Upon receiving the information of the hostile situation in Nagaland, the Jorhat Police immediately contacted Mokochung Superintendent of Police, who sent a team to the spot to rescue the Assam Police personnel. "The locals then realised that it was a genuine police team from Assam and released five members, including the injured person. They, however, held the remaining 11 persons as captives overnight. They were released in the morning and reached Jorhat later," the official said. In recent times several untoward incidents leading to even casualties have been reported related to following the google maps.

One Election, complex views



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

First meeting of Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) meeting on one Nation one poll bills on Wednesday witnessed exchange of opinions between the Opposition and ruling party MPs. Opposition MPs criticised the bills as an attack on the basic fabric of the Constitution and federalism and BJP MPs hailing it as reflective of popular opinion. All MPs were given a trolley carrying over 18,000 pages, including one volume of the Kovind committee report each in Hindi and English, and 21 volumes of annexure, besides a soft copy as well. The MPs attending the meeting of the 39-member JPC expressed their views and asked questions following a presentation by the Ministry of Law and Justice on the provisions of the bills and the

other eminent lawmakers, including those in the Nehru government, acted in violation of the Constitution. Another BJP MP, V D Sharma, said the idea of simultaneous elections was reflective of the popular will. He also noted that the high-level committee headed by former president Ram Nath Kovind had consulted over 25,000 members of the public, with an overwhelming majority supporting the idea. The BJP MPs reiterated that a continuous cycle of elections hampers development, the country's growth and is a drain on the exchequer. One nation one election will be a boost to growth and development, they added. Shiv Sena, which was represented by Shrikant Shinde, cited the case of Maharashtra where Lok Sabha, assembly, and local body polls are held back to back within few months, stressing that this derails development work as the entire state machinery is busy in the conduct of elections. Several opposition MPs, including those from the Congress, DMK and the Trinamool Congress, echoed their parties' stated views that the proposed laws run contrary to the Constitution and are attack on its basic fabric as well as federalism.

Continued on page 8

Allahabad HC stays civil court case on Sambhal Jama Masjid

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The Allahabad High Court on Wednesday stayed further proceedings before a civil court hearing the dispute over Jama Masjid in UP's Sambhal. Justice Rohit Ranjan Agarwal passed the direction on a revision plea filed by the mosque's management committee. The plea was filed after a Supreme Court order related to the matter and challenges the proceedings aside from the maintainability of the suit filed over the dispute in the Sambhal district court. The plea alleged the suit was filed on the afternoon of November 19, 2024, and within hours, the judge appointed a court commissioner, and directed him to carry out an initial survey at the mosque site. The survey, it said, was carried out the same day, and again on November 24. The court, the plea said, directed for the survey report to be filed by November 29. After hearing counsel for parties, the high court ordered the respondents to file their reply within four weeks and posted the matter on February 25. The suit before the Sambhal



district court was filed by Hari Shanker. The court fixed February 25 for further hearing of the matter. The order of the court came within days of submission of the survey report in the district court by a court commissioner. The commissioner had conducted a survey in the masjid in November at Sambhal, which had witnessed large scale violence in which had witnessed large scale violence in which four persons were killed and scores others injured. According to the sources, the survey report contained video footage and photographs taken during the survey inside the mosque in two phases on November 19 and 24 respectively. The lawyer for the Mosque Committee sought quashing of the district order saying that the survey order was issued by the civil court on the day the petition seeking the same was filed by the Hindu petitioners.

Waterbird census records changes in Yamuna's birds

T K ROY ■ NEW DELHI

Ravaged river Yamuna, flowing for nearly 22 kms through Delhi, has seen a mixed bag on its wetlands as regards arrival of water birds this year. While some species of migratory water birds in lesser number arrived, the wetlands managed to attract maximum number of Gulls. Gulls continuously cannot stay longer on the most degraded, polluted riverine habitat and keep moving in search of food, roosting and attracted to the banks of Yamuna where public throws food to them for feeding, according to Asian Waterbird Census (AWC) Delhi state coordinator and ecologist T K Roy said here on Thursday. He said Wetlands International's annual Asian Waterbird Census (AWC) part of the global International Waterbird Census is carried out in the month of January in 27 countries together in Asia and Australasia. Indian volunteers participate in it under coordination of the AWC State Coordinators as per the confirmed annual



Ruddy Shelduck



Flock of Gulls



Great Cormorant

in Delhi. Still some species of migratory water birds in lesser number arrived and maximum number of Gulls. During AWC 2025 recorded diversity increased water bird species diversity i.e. 25 species of total population 2,123 includes 16 resident species and 09 migratory species in comparison to AWC 2024 i.e. 22 species of total population 2,037 includes 08 resident species and 14 migratory species. In 2025, among 09 migratory species include largely Black-headed Gulls 1,636 and among 16 resident species largely Black-winged Stilts 110, Little Cormorant 104, Indian Cormorants 53 in comparison to last year (2024) 14 migratory species largely Black-headed Gulls 1,646, Great Cormorant 81 and among 08 resident species largely Black-winged Stilt 198. Among the migratory duck species recorded only Ruddy Shelduck 06 instead of 16 Common Teal last year, Pallas's Gull 09 instead of 01 last year and resident birds Grey Heron 59 than 24 last year and IUCN Red-listed Near Threatened (NT) resident species River Lapwing 09

recorded in 2025 than last year 03 and Painted Stork 14 this year than no record last year. On River Yamuna last four years, AWC recorded variable species diversity in numbers. Among these resident species either decreased or increased in number recorded as follows: Black-winged Stilt decreased, Red-wattled lapwing increased, Grey Heron increased, Indian Spot-billed Duck decreased, Little Cormorant increased, River Lapwing increased, Among the winter migratory species, Great Cormorant from East and Southeast Asia increased, Brown-headed Gull migrating from Central Asia decreased, Black-headed Gull migrates from Central Asia and Siberia increased and Pallas's Gull migrates from Central Asia partially increased.

— Writer is an Ecologist, Ornithologist and State Coordinator at AWC Delhi State Coordinator; Wetlands International (South Asia)

Slight relief in bitter cold weather conditions

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

There was a slight relief in the bitter cold weather conditions as the sun made a very brief appearance

On Wednesday. The MET department has forecast improvement in the weather conditions after January 12. Senior scientist at the Met department, Mohammed Danish, said that there was some improvement in the

weather conditions on Wednesday with Lucknow witnessing an increase in the maximum temperature though foggy conditions prevailed. "On Thursday there will be fog in the morning but there will again be some relief," he said. He said that cold day conditions and fog would prevail for the next three days in Uttar Pradesh. "After January 11, western UP will receive some rainfall," he said.

Lucknow recorded a minimum temperature of 10.6 degree Celsius and the maximum of 16 degree Celsius. Fatehpur and Fatehgarh recorded a minimum temperature of 7.2 degree Celsius while Agra was the coldest at 5.6 degree Celsius in the state.

Danish said that because of the cold day conditions prevailing in the state there was a small difference between the maximum and the minimum temperatures recorded in the

districts. "Once the fog starts dissipating the minimum temperature will fall while the maximum temperature will rise. From Thursday onwards there will be a slight increase in the maximum temperature," he added.

He further informed that after two to three days there will be a wind reversal which will bring about warm conditions. "A western disturbance is approaching which will bring a wind reversal with the westerly winds that are blowing now. These easterly winds are warm and will improve the weather conditions," he added.

He said that there would be rainfall in western UP and central UP on January 11 and 12. "On January 11, Lucknow will also witness slight rains and cloudy weather. Sunny skies can be expected after January 12," he added.

Milkipur bypoll: Yogi leads BJP's charge to avenge Ayodhya loss, SP determined to retain seat

PTI ■ AYODHYA

The ruling BJP has deployed a battery of leaders under Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's command to campaign in the Milkipur Assembly segment, which is a part of the Faizabad Lok Sabha constituency in Ayodhya district, to avenge its shock defeat to the Samajwadi Party in last year's general election. The Akhilesh Yadav-led SP on the other hand has asserted that it would emerge victorious in the prestigious battle. The Election Commission on Tuesday declared that the bypoll in Milkipur would be held on February 5 and the votes would be counted on February 8. Before this, bypolls to nine seats were held in November 2024 with the BJP and its ally RLD winning seven of them, while the SP managed victory on two.

The SP's emphatic victory in Faizabad in Ayodhya — months after the consecration ceremony of the Ram Temple in the holy town — was a setback for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in a district historically aligned with its Hindutva agenda. The Milkipur seat fell vacant after SP leader Awadhesh Prasad, who won it in 2022, vacated it following his Lok Sabha win. BJP, facing the challenge of

redeeming itself, has called in top leaders to lead the campaign with Adityanath fronting the battle. BJP spokesperson in Ayodhya, Rajneesh Singh, told PTI, "This by-election of Milkipur will be a battle to take revenge for the defeat of the Faizabad Lok Sabha. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath himself is managing the election, so there is no chance that we will lose." On the other hand, the SP remains resolute in the fierce battle. Parasnath Yadav, the SP's district president in Ayodhya, stated, "It is true that we are contesting against the government. The whole government system has been roped in by the BJP to win this by-election. But the people of Milkipur are with us. We will fight hard to the last extent and will definitely win this seat."

Congress' state unit chief Ajay Rai expressed confidence in its alliance with the SP, reaffirming its support to the Akhilesh Yadav-led party. "We are standing with the SP with strength. Just like we stood with them in the last UP elections, we will remain in the alliance and ensure victory in the Milkipur elections," Rai told PTI. BJP sources said Adityanath has assigned six ministers to oversee the party's campaign in

Milkipur, led by Surya Pratap Shahi, who is also the district in-charge, and supported by Water Resources Minister Swatantra Dev Singh, Cooperative State Minister JPS Rathore, AYUSH Minister Dayashankar Singh, State Minister Mayankeshwar Sharan Singh, and Satish Sharma. Deputy chief ministers Keshav Prasad Maurya and Brajesh Pathak will also actively campaign, emphasising the seat's importance to the BJP's prestige.

During the 2022 Assembly election and the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, SP's Awadhesh Prasad made the stray cattle menace a central issue and successfully leveraged the problem to win public support. Stray cattle caused widespread crop damage and injuries to residents, leading to farmer unrest, which many attributed as a factor in the BJP's defeat. The bypoll was delayed due to a court case but cleared after former BJP MLA Baba Gorakhnath withdrew his petition. Milkipur is poised for a high-stakes electoral battle on February 5. Observers believe that the outcome will not only shape local politics but also indicate broader voter sentiment in Ayodhya, a district symbolic of BJP's core agenda.

SP seeks access to webcasting of polling stations

Lucknow (PTI): The Samajwadi Party has called for the webcasting of all 414 polling stations in the Milkipur Assembly constituency and its access during the February 5 by-election.

According to a press statement issued by the party, it has demanded that the webcasting links be provided to the candidates contesting the election and the recognised political parties, to "ensure transparency and prevent any potential irregularities."

In a memorandum sent to the Chief Electoral Officer of Uttar Pradesh on Wednesday, Shyam Lal Pal, the state president of the SP, stressed that allowing candidates and political parties to view the webcasting would help them stay informed about any incidents or disturbances at the polling stations.

"This would ensure that the elections are conducted in a free, fair, and transparent manner," reads the memorandum.

Doctor drugged, robbed on way to Gonda

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A doctor was drugged and robbed of his Rs 5,000 and his mobile phone on the way to his work place in Gonda district. A complaint was lodged on Wednesday and subsequently a case was registered. As per reports, Dr KK Singh of Para police station area was going to Nawabganj Gonda for duty in a seat sharing car which he boarded in Chinhat. On the way, the driver of the sharing car and another person sitting in the car made the victim drink some intoxicating substance in his tea and took away Rs. 5000 cash and mobile phone kept in his pocket.

"The miscreants took another route to reach Gonda and when he asked the reason the car driver told him that he was doing so to save toll tax," the

victim's family said. Regarding robbery by giving intoxicating tea, the victim's wife lodged a complaint. A spokesman said in the above case, a total of three teams had been formed under the supervision of Assistant Commissioner of Police, Kakori and efforts were being done for successful disclosure of the incident. "Further legal action is being taken by collecting evidence and observing CCTV footage," he said.

The incident exposed the police laxity in handling such crimes. The sources said in the past similar incidents had taken place. "The police have no details on the car drivers who ferry passengers to districts in eastern UP. The unsuspecting passengers usually fell into the trap of the robbers," the sources said.

IT dept holds seminar on TDS provisions

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A seminar on TDS/TCS provisions and wrongful claims of refunds was organised at the office of Commissioner, Food & Civil Supplies, UP by Dr Sangita Sinha, Deputy Commissioner of Income Tax (TDS), Lucknow under Range (TDS), Lucknow on Wednesday. It was chaired by Kamleendra Kumar, Finance Controller, and attended by senior regional account officers, district supply officers and other account officers and staff through video conferencing and offline also with more than 85 participants.

In the programme, TDS provisions were explained in detail and employers and employees were also sensitised about the wrongful claim of deductions under Chapter VI A of the Income tax Act, 1961 and consequences thereof. In addition, employers were advised to review the deduc-



tions claimed by the employees and take corrective measures to revise/update the returns of income. The queries raised during the seminar were well attended and satisfactorily replied. Demand notices pertaining to DDOs

were also prepared beforehand and were handed over to them in the seminar. It was emphasised that these notices were required to be immediately responded to and they were directed to clear the demand at the earliest.

The seminar concluded with a question and answer session and vote of thanks. The programme was conducted and addressed by Dr Sangita Sinha, DCIT (TDS), Lucknow, Saurabh Gupta, ITI, and Archana Rajoria, OS.

Two held for attacking youth with scissors

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The police arrested two accused who injured a youth by attacking him with scissors in Madaion area of Lucknow on Wednesday.

The accused were arrested from under Madaion bridge where they were discussing plans to run away. Police sent them to jail.

As per reports, Shivam Soni, a resident of Gayatri Nagar in Naubasta, Madaion, had gone to Anmol Sharma's shop near Naubasta bridge on Friday to get hair cut. There he picked an argument with Anmol Sharma's brother Chandrasekhar.

Chandrasekhar picked up the scissors from the salon and stabbed Shivam in the stomach. Shivam informed the police about this. The police reached the spot and sent the

injured to the hospital and registered a case against Anmol and his brother.

During investigation, the police received information that the accused who had attacked Shivam with scissors were standing near the toilet under the Madaion bridge and were discussing plan to flee the city. The police reached the spot and caught both of them.

The accused confessed to their crime and disclosed that the victim had used abusive language for them and they attacked him due to this.

FIRE INCIDENT

A fire broke out in the house of a writer living in Indira Nagar Sector C in Lucknow on Wednesday afternoon due to a short circuit. The FSO said that as the fire was extinguished on time, huge losses were averted.

Scrap dealer killed by friends for money

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

After identifying the youth whose body was recovered from thickets along the highway in Itaunja, the police arrested four friends of the deceased for his murder.

The deceased was identified as scrap dealer Manna hailing from Rae Bareilly district. According to police, the scrap dealer was kidnapped by his friends in greed of money. After they received Rs 50,000 from his family, he was strangled to death with a muffer and his body was taken away in a car and thrown in the thickets.

As per reports, Manna (28) of Aishbagh area, used to deal in scrap. According to his brother Farman, Manna was married to Sufia, of ??Rae Bareilly nine years ago. After marriage, Manna built a house near the house of his living in Rae Bareilly and started living there. Farman also lived with him. Farman said that Awadhesh Yadav of Maharajganj in Rae Bareilly and Manna were very good friends and both of them often used to deal in scrap together. According to the brother of the deceased, Awadhesh reached

Manna's house on January 5 and told Manna that they could bag a big scrap deal in Lucknow comprising brass and copper material and earn a lot of profit. Manna left with him to negotiate the scrap deal. After this, around 9 pm, Manna called his wife, Sufia, and told her that more money was needed for the scrap deal. His wife then sent Rs 50,000 to him through an acquaintance, Adil.

When Adil reached the main gate of SGP GIMS with the money, he met two people there. They made him talk to Manna on mobile phone. Manna asked Adil to give the money to the people he had met at the gate of the SGP GIMS. He also told Adil that he will come after some time. Both the people took the money and left.

Adil waited for Manna at the main gate of SGP GIMS for a long time. When Manna did not come, he called on his mobile number but it was switched off. After this, Adil returned home and informed Manna's family members about this. When Manna did not reach home till late night, the family members started searching for him but in vain. On January 6, the family mem-

RMLIMS to recruit 320 doctors and faculty

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Ram Manohar Lohia Institute of Medical Sciences will be recruiting 320 doctors and faculty in the coming days. RMLIMS Director Dr CM Singh said here on Wednesday that the advertisement for the same would be floated in the next 15 days. He admitted that this is the first time that such a large number of faculty will be recruited. "It is taking place

after a gap because the last regular recruitment was in 2019. For the last five years there was no regular recruitment of the faculty which is the reason that there is a deficiency of regular faculty in the institute and this is why we are trying to complete the process as early as possible," he said. Dr Singh said that the recruitments were being made for all the 40 departments in which there were 320 vacancies. He admitted that in December 2023, the then director of the

institute had floated an advertisement for the recruitment of the doctors and the faculty but it was quashed by the High Court. He said that currently the institute had 110 regular doctors and 1,270 beds. "The hospital has an average footfall of 3,500 in the OPD," he added. Meanwhile, Dr Singh informed that the institute will soon be having a neuroscience centre. "The fire safety NOC has been pending for

a long time. Equipment procurement is in the process and its shifting to the new centre will take place shortly," he said. He said this was the first of its kind of centre in any government hospital in the state. "It will cater to patients of brain tumour, malignancy, accidents, brain haemorrhage, strokes, severe back pain and several other patients of neurosurgery. We are also planning to have a Gamma knife which will also be first in UP," he added

CLASSIFIEDS

NOTICE

I have changed my name from ISRARUL HAQ TO ASRARUL HAQ for all future purposes, ASRARUL HAQ S/O JAWADUL HAQ R/O 98/204, Nazir Bagh, Becon Ganj, Kanpur Nagar

NOTICE

I have changed my name from MOHAMMAD SHAHID TO MOHD SHAHID for all future purposes, MOHD SHAHID S/O MOHD SAMI R/O 88/49- A, Chaman Ganj, Kanpur Nagar

NOTICE

I Varun Trivedi S/O Mahesh Kumar Trivedi R/O 37/23 Tar Ghar Road Kanpur Nagar, 208001 I have correction in my 10 marksheet (ICSE) Board Unique Id No. 7790814 Index No. 1234887/144 Year 2022-2023 Bishop Westcott School Civil Lines Kanpur Nagar, 208001 My father name is wrongly mentioned in marksheet is Mahesh Trivedi but correct name is Mahesh Kumar Trivedi

सूचना

सूचित किया जाता है कि श्याम रावत पुत्र रामचन्द्र निं सुगामक, लखनऊ एवं श्याम कुमार दोनो नाम एक ही व्यक्ति के हैं। भविष्य में इन्हें श्याम कुमार के नाम से जाना जाए।

NOTICE

I, Govind Prasad, Father of Surya Prakash Tiwari of 100 Fd Regt resident of Vill - Somnabhar, Post - Dhammour, teh - Sultanpur, Dist - Sultanpur, pin - 227408, state - UP have changed my name from Govind Prasad to Govind Prasad Tiwari vide Affidavit dated 06 Jan 2025 at Sultanpur.

आवश्यकता है

श्री शंकर भगवान इस्ट्रीटवूट ऑफ टेकनोलॉजी मऊ-चित्रकूट, उत्तर प्रदेश

आवश्यकता है

प्रवक्ता-बी.ए.-संस्कृत-01 पद, राजनीति विज्ञान-01 पद, प्रवक्ता-बी.एस.सी.-वनस्पति विज्ञान-01 पद,शैक्षिक विज्ञान-01 पद, रिक्तियाँ घटाई एवं बढ़ाई जा सकती हैं। योग्यता-आखण्ड एवं वेतन-यू.जी.सी. एवं उ.प्र. शासन के अनुसार नोट -> प्रार्थना पत्र समेत अमिलेखों सहित 07 दिनों के अन्दर भेजना सुनिश्चित करें।

NOTICE

I Priyanka Mishra W/O Pankaj Kumar Mishra R/O 4/222 Vijayant Khand, Gomti Nagar do hereby declare that the Original Possession letter dated 17/01/2001 in the name of Rajendra and Power of Attorney dated 2/9/2000 Sr No. 762/2000 Page No. 313/318. The address of the property is C-2/596 Vineet Khand, Gomti Nagar, Lucknow. I further state that I wish to create Equitable Mortgage on the said property for loan from SBI Nirala Nagar (03813) branch. An FIR has been lodged with the police in respect of lost (Possession letter and Power of Attorney) vide FIR no. 20250000116385 dated 07/01/2025. If anyone has any objection, kindly contact above mentioned branch of SBI.

NOTICE

PUBLIC NOTICED
Be inform that my client Piramal Capital and Housing Finance Limited intends to provide a finance to one of its clients Sri Abubakar & Smt. Rafiya Begum against their property being Shop No. 143/66, with land measuring 144 sq. fts. i.e. 13.382 sq. mtr. situated at Mohalla- Gunge Nawab Park, Ward- Aminabad, District Lucknow. In chain of title being original sale deed dated 06.06.1985 vide document No. 9131 favoring the ex-owner Smt. Raj Kumari Verma is allegedly lost & misplaced. If any person has any right, title or interest over the said property, he may approach to the undersigned within 07 days in writing along with the evidence of his such right, title or interest and if no such objection will be received within the said period it will be presumed that the property in question is free from all encumbrances and any claim in respect thereof against purchaser shall be void and ineffective.
(Tarun Prakash Srivastava)
Advocate, Mob.: 9335914262
Office: Room No. 111, Citi Hotel, 24, B.N. Road, Lalbagh, Lucknow.

CLASSIFIEDS

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Mohammad Ajmal Sheikh to Sheikh Mohammad Ajmal S/O Wazir Mohammad Qureshi for future purpose. 90/239 Itikharabad Kanpur Nagar.

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Nizamuddin Lal Mohammad to LAL MOHAMMAD S/O Nizamuddin R/o 105/693 Plot No-1 Bhannanapurwa Kanpur for all future purpose.

NOTICE

I MOHD AMIR S/O MOHAMMAD HAMEED R/O L-31/1 KDA COLONY GANGA VIHAR JAJMAU SHIWANS TANNEY KANPUR Nagar, have changed my name MOHAMMAD AMIR TO MOHD AMIR for all future purposes.

NOTICE

I Laeequ Ahmad changed my name Laeeq Ahmad S/o Lt. Rais Ahmad for all future purpose R/o 78/A Flat No.302, Faheem Apartment Shyam Nagar Kanpur

NOTICE

Original allotment letter Dated - 28-02-2007 of my Property No-5 H - 81 EWS, Avas Vikas Scheme No-2, Hanspuram Kanpur has been lost somewhere. Any use of the same Shall be illegal. Rizwan Ahmad S/o Mohd Yaseen R/O 5 H - 214 - 215, Avas Vikas Hanspuram Kanpur

सूचना

मैं उषेश कुमार पाण्डेय पुत्र भीम पाण्डेय निवासी श्री नारायण आश्रम, शिवकुटी, तेलियरगंज, प्रयागराज, उप्र 211004 का निवासी हूँ। मैंने गृहस्थ जीवन का त्याग कर जून 2023 को संन्यासी जीवन की शपथ ली है। आश्रम संतो द्वारा उषेश कुमार पाण्डेय के स्थान पर सन्त नीरज दास नाम हो गया है। अब से मेरी जान, पहचान सन्त नीरज दास के नाम से होगी।

सूचना

मैं सचिन पुत्र रामनाथ यादव निवासी 29/30 मीरा गली, दादरगंज, प्रयागराज, उप्र 211006 का निवासी हूँ। मैंने गृहस्थ जीवन का त्याग कर जून 2023 को संन्यासी जीवन की शपथ ली है। आश्रम संतो द्वारा सचिन के स्थान पर सन्त सचिन दास नाम हो गया है। अब मेरी जान, पहचान सन्त सचिन दास के नाम से होगी।

NOTICE

This is to inform to all that my name has been erroneously written as Azim in my passport No. R6196505 whereas my correct name is Mo. Azim. The correct name also registered in my Aadhaar card. Mo. Azim R/o Teen Bate 19/25 Gaurapatti Police Station Kotwali Nagar Cantt District Ayodhya

NOTICE

This is to inform to all that According to the Aadhaar card, my mother's name is Mrs. SHAGUFTA RIZVI, W/o Syed Jamal Haider. However, in my high school certificate, my mother's name is recorded as Mrs. SHAGHIFIA RIZVI. The correct name of my mother is Mrs. Shagufta Rizvi. Syed Jahan Haider, R/o 3/20/129 Nahar Bagh, City Faizabad, District Ayodhya

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS

CHANGE OF NAME

I hitherto known as ADITYA SAHANI alias HOSILA DEVI W/O DHARMENDRA SAHANI R/o Bairiya Khas, VTC Bairia Khas, PO Bairia Khas Dist Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh - 273402 have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as HOSILA DEVI.

PD(1216)C

Set an inspirational example by your actions: Yogi

ADDRESSES WOMEN MEMBERS OF UP AND UTTARAKHAND LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLIES

PNS ■ KANPUR

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has emphasised that impactful work, not the duration of tenure, defines a memorable and remarkable journey in the legislature. Addressing a conference of women legislators from Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, he said, "The true measure of your tenure lies in how effectively you leave a mark." "In Uttar Pradesh, you represent six to seven lakh people; in Uttarakhand, this responsibility extends to three and a half to four lakh people. Such an opportunity is a privilege granted to one in millions," he added. Chief Minister Yogi urged legislators to utilise their platform to set an example that inspires others, adding, "Your presence in the legislature will be meaningful when you champion issues affecting the common people and address ground realities. The words spoken in the legislature become a legacy for future generations." Expressing gratitude to the presiding authorities of both assemblies, Chief Minister Yogi remarked, "This is a joyous moment for me, as Uttar Pradesh is my 'karmabhoomi' (land of work) and Uttarakhand my 'janmabhoomi' (birthplace)." He also praised Ritu Khanduri's fami-

ly for their remarkable contributions to the nation, noting their rich traditions of experience and heritage. Chief Minister Yogi highlighted that Uttar Pradesh houses the largest assembly in the country, renowned for its groundbreaking initiatives over the past two and a half years. "The UP assembly has not only adopted innovation but has also successfully implemented the e-Vidhan system, making it paperless," he said, adding that parliamentary democracy allows discussions on advanced technologies, paving way for first-hand experience. The UP chief minister praised the assembly for providing experts from diverse fields a platform. "While party commitments often dominate Vidhan Sabha discussions, when advocates, engineers, doctors, scientists and representatives from different parties come together, we rise above political boundaries to focus on societal and national progress," he remarked. Chief Minister Yogi also addressed the representation of women in legislative bodies, noting that in progressive countries, women's representation is often below 10 per cent. "In Uttarakhand, it is slightly above 10 per cent, while in the UP assembly, it stands at 14-15 per cent. With the enactment



Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, UP Assembly Speaker Satish Mahana, Uttarakhand Assembly Speaker Ritu Khanduri, at the inauguration of the conference of women legislators from Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand in Kanpur on Wednesday

of the Nari Shakti Vandan Act, this representation will further increase," he stated. Regarding Indian democracy, Chief Minister Yogi described it as the largest and oldest in the world, deeply rooted in the

nation's culture. "Modern democracies emerged much later globally, but India was ahead in embracing democratic values," he said. Regarding women's empowerment, Chief Minister Yogi

noted that when India conducted its first general elections in 1952, women were granted the right to vote alongside men. "Countries like England extended voting rights to women much later. India has

always been ahead of others in recognising and ensuring equality," he said, emphasising that men and women uphold the social system, starting from the family. Chief Minister Yogi emphasised that no scheme can

achieve remarkable success solely through government efforts, calling for active societal participation. He highlighted the transformative initiatives under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership over the past decade: "Toilets, a symbol of women's dignity, were constructed in every household. Over four crore families received housing, with women beneficiaries included. More than 10 crore LPG connections have significantly improved women's lives. The enactment of the Nari Shakti Vandan Act ensures that post-2029, women's representation in elections — both assembly and parliamentary — will rise from the current 14-15 per cent to over one-third, potentially reaching 33-50 per cent," he said. The chief minister noted the significant strides women have made in local governance. "Women constitute 56 per cent of block pramukh positions and 70 per cent of district panchayat chairpersons. Their representation in gram pradhan and local body elections is commendable, and they are performing exceptionally well," he stated. However, he urged women to make informed and sensitive decisions in legislative roles, particularly regarding societal welfare schemes. "To contribute effectively in the legislature, one must closely observe social life. No aspect is inherently weak or flawed — the perspective makes the difference," he added. Chief Minister Yogi highlighted Uttar Pradesh's

highly important, noting that four of the 15 women in the Constituent Assembly were from UP (then UP and Uttarakhand): Kamla Chaudhary, Sucheta Kriplani, Begum Ejaz Rasool, and Purnima Banerjee. "These women played a pivotal role in drafting the Constitution. Just as women manage households with remarkable organisation, they should lead development efforts in gram panchayats, local bodies, legislative assemblies, and Lok Sabha," he said. He discussed efforts to make gram panchayats self-reliant and explained how initiatives like Drone Didi and BC Sakhi create employment opportunities. "Each village can provide jobs to at least five to seven people. By empowering women's volunteer groups and creating self-reliant gram panchayats, we can inspire neighbouring villages to follow suit. Establishing one or two exemplary areas in each assembly constituency can set a precedent for others," he stated. The chief minister asserted that when government efforts are complemented by societal collaboration, creating ideal development models becomes achievable. "The journey begins with one example, but the impact will resonate far and wide," he said. UP Assembly Speaker Satish Mahana, Uttarakhand Assembly Speaker Ritu Khanduri, Cabinet Ministers Baby Rani Maurya, Gulab Devi, Minister Rajni Tiwari, Pratibha Shukla and others were present in the programme.

Sanatan is supreme, beyond comparison, says Yogi

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Wednesday, stated that the belief system of Sanatan Dharma represents the world's oldest culture, standing above comparison with any religion or sect. "I inherit a legacy that spans thousands of years, with its cultural and spiritual events equally ancient. The tradition of Sanatan is higher than the sky and beyond comparison," he remarked. Speaking at the Maha Kumbh Mahasammelan organised by a private news channel, Chief Minister Yogi emphasised the profound significance of the Maha Kumbh. He explained that after the Devasura Sangram (the battle between gods and demons), drops of nectar fell at four sacred locations — Prayagraj, Haridwar, Ujjain, and Nashik. The Maha Kumbh at these sites has served as a platform for shaping India's knowledge, ideology and social direction throughout history, he added. He further stated that the Maha Kumbh is more than just a religious gathering; it symbolises India's spiritual heritage and national unity. Chief Minister Yogi highlighted that during the Maha Kumbh, sages from across India would gather to reflect on the social and political conditions of their times, making the event not just a reverence for tradition but also essential for preserving cultural wisdom for future generations. Chief Minister Yogi lauded the leadership of Prime Minister

Narendra Modi, saying, "The organisation of Maha Kumbh represents a remarkable confluence of India's heritage and development." Reflecting on the 2019 Prayagraj Kumbh, he highlighted how modern technology, efficient management and cultural traditions were seamlessly integrated. "We will strive to achieve the same harmony in the upcoming Maha Kumbh," he assured. He emphasised that the Uttar Pradesh government, in collaboration with the Central government, has taken numerous measures to ensure the Maha Kumbh is both grand and meticulously organised. "This event is drawing not just the citizens of India, but also people from around the globe," he noted. Chief Minister Yogi described the Maha Kumbh as a golden opportunity to showcase India's rich cultural heritage on an international stage. Describing Maha Kumbh as a profound symbol of national and cultural unity, Chief Minister Yogi said, "This event transcends caste, creed and gender barriers. Maha Kumbh will serve as a powerful reflection of the progress India has made over the past decade under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It stands as a living testament to India's prosperity, rich heritage and spiritual tradition." Chief Minister Yogi further remarked that certain individuals, "who thrive on foreign leftovers," are trying to tarnish the nation's image. He accused them of exploiting caste divi-

sions for political gains, but affirmed that the people of India have become more aware and will not fall prey to such divisive tactics. While discussing national and Hindu unity, Chief Minister Yogi emphasised that Sanatan Dharma has always held the highest position, asserting that Hindu unity and national unity go hand in hand. He remarked, "History bears witness that division has always led to weakness, unity has made us invincible. That is why I have always maintained — 'Batenge toh katenge, ek rahenge toh nek rahenge' ('Divided we fall, united we thrive')." Criticising the opposition, Chief Minister Yogi accused certain groups of attempting to divide society along caste and religious lines, calling them forces conspiring to weaken the nation. He asserted that the people of the country have grown more aware and are no longer susceptible to such divisive tactics. "Today, it is not the citizens of Uttar Pradesh, but the mafia and criminals who are running away from the state," he added. Taking a strong stance on the issue of land occupation under the name of the Waqf Board, Chief Minister Yogi questioned, "It is hard to tell whether it is a Waqf Board or a board of land mafias." He stated that his government has amended the Waqf Act and is actively investigating all occupied land. "We will reclaim every inch of land that has been taken under the pretext of Waqf, and it will be used to

build housing, educational institutions and hospitals for the poor," he affirmed. Chief Minister Yogi strongly criticised the Samajwadi Party and its leaders, emphasising their failure to uphold the principles of Dr Ram Manohar Lohia. He reminded that Dr Lohia had once said, "If you want to understand India, study the traditions of Ram, Krishna, and Shiva." He asserted, "Those who claim to follow the ideals of Lohia never truly understood his words." Highlighting the development of Ayodhya, Chief Minister Yogi remarked, "We have transformed Ayodhya into a centre of development and heritage. Those who once opposed Ayodhya's progress have no moral authority to visit the city now." Addressing the dispute over religious sites in Sambhal, the chief minister pointed out that the Puranas mention Sambhal as the birthplace of Kalki, the tenth incarnation of Shri Hari Vishnu. He condemned attempts to encroach on religious sites by damaging them, stating, "Our government took decisive action based on the court's order and sent a clear message to the rioters." Speaking on the topics of religious conversion and Ghar Wapsi (homecoming to one's ancestral faith), Chief Minister Yogi affirmed, "If someone genuinely wishes to return to their original faith from the heart, they should be welcomed. This reflects a conscious respect for religion and tradition."

UP govt likely to hike cane SAP

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh government is likely to increase the state advisory price (SAP) for sugarcane for the current crushing season 2024-25. The decision is likely to be taken this month. If the SAP is revised, it will bring cheers to farmers but might impact sugar millers, who claim to be facing financial hurdles. Sugarcane Minister Lakshmi Narayan Chaudhary said that a decision might be taken in the cabinet meeting whenever it is held in the second week of January. He said that the report from the Sugarcane Research Centre and experts had already been received. The state's farmers are eagerly awaiting the announcement, hoping that the cabinet will approve the new SAP soon. However, Chaudhary refrained from specifying the exact amount by which the price might be increased. Earlier during the winter session of the state assembly, the minister had said that efforts were being made to ensure farmers receive a fair price for sugarcane, and that this process was currently underway. This announcement has sparked optimism among sugarcane farmers, many of whom have expressed dissatisfaction with the current price. Farmers in Uttar Pradesh have been demanding a hike in the SAP for sugarcane as the

crushing season for 2024-25 has already commenced from December. In January 2024, the state government had raised the SAP for sugarcane by Rs 20 per quintal, a few months ahead of the Lok Sabha election. The SAP for early variety was Rs 370 per quintal and the common variety price was Rs 360 per quintal. The Yogi government first raised the sugarcane SAP by Rs 10 in 2017 after coming to power. It was further raised by Rs 25 per quintal in 2021 before the UP assembly elections in 2022. With the last hike in January 2024, the Yogi government has raised the cumulative SAP by Rs 55 per quintal in the last seven years. On the other hand, sugar millers across the country are urging the government to increase the minimum selling price (MSP) of sugar. The current MSP of sugar, set at Rs 31 per kg in February 2019, has remained unchanged. However, industry groups have called for an increase due to rising production costs and financial pressures on sugar mills. The Indian Sugar and Bio-Energy Manufacturers Association (ISMA), the National Federation of Cooperative Sugar Factories (NFCFSF) and other sugar bodies are advocating for an increase in MSP, arguing that such a hike is necessary to align with production costs and support the financial stability of sugar mills in India.

Yogi govt offers interest, guarantee-free loans to aspiring entrepreneurs

Lucknow (PNS): As part of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's Mission Rozgar, the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) department is set to launch the Mukhyamantri Yuva Udyami Vikas Abhiyan on the occasion of UP Diwas on January 24, to encourage youth entrepreneurship. Chief Minister Yogi will launch the campaign. In a first for the state, interest and guarantee-free loans of up to Rs 5 lakh are being provided for four years to set up industries. To ensure smooth implementation, economic experts, chartered accountants and retired bank officials have been deployed in every district to assist young entrepreneurs from application to project operation, maximising the scheme's outreach and impact. The MSME Department is fully prepared to ensure the success of this initiative, focusing on streamlining the administrative process and making it more

user-friendly. Youth can apply for the scheme online through the department's website, (<https://msme.up.gov.in/https://msme.up.gov.in/>), which also features 400 project reports and nearly 600 business ideas to assist aspiring entrepreneurs. Principal Secretary (MSME Promotion) Alok Kumar highlighted that the scheme has been fully digitised in line with the vision of Chief Minister Yogi. "There is no scope for favoritism. To support youth in their entrepreneurial journey, the department has stationed CAs and retired bank officials in every district. These experts will guide them from application submission to project execution," he said. Additionally, the MSME Department plans to deploy two CM Fellows and computer operators in every district to provide further assistance. This marks the first time the state has introduced expert deployment for youth employment.

Corporate and Services Department, Star House, Vibhuti Khand, Gombi Nagar, Zonal Office, Lucknow-226010, Ph. No. : 0522-2306039

बैंक ऑफ इंडिया **BOI** ★
Bank of India

Requirement of Premises For Shifting of Gosaiganj Branch

Detailed Notification inviting offers for Shifting of our Gosaiganj Branch, Lucknow Zone within 1-1.5 Km from the existing Branch Premises is available on our web site www.bankofindia.co.in. Prescribed format for submission of offer may be obtained from our Office at Bank of India, Star House, Gombi Nagar, 1- Vibhuti Khand, Lucknow- 226010 OR may be downloaded from our Website www.bankofindia.co.in.

Last date for submission of offer is up to 18.01.2025 up to 5.00 PM.

Deputy Zonal Manager
Lucknow Zone

Date : 09.01.2025

Police transfers continue; 14 promoted, 17 shifted

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The process of transfers in the police department continues. The government has transferred 14 more IPS officers, including six DIGs. The DGP headquarters has released the transfer list. Among these, 14 officers who got promotion in the new year have been given new appointments at their workplace itself. These include the names of 2010 batch IPS officer Dr Dharamveer Singh who was promoted from SP to DIG, 2011 batch IPS officer Ajay Kumar, Dr Arvind Chaturvedi, Dinesh Singh, Arvind Kumar Maurya and Subhash Chandra Shakya. The list includes the names of eight officers who were promoted from PPS cadre to IPS cadre. Among them, Sameer

Saurabh, Mohd. Irfan Ansari, Rashmi Rani, Lakshmi Niwas Mishra, Rajesh Kumar Srivastava, Vishwajeet Srivastava, Amrita Mishra and Mayaram Verma have been appointed to the post of SP at their place of posting. On Tuesday night, the state government had reshuffled the deployment of 17 IPS officers, including the police chiefs of eight districts. These include Mirzapur, Lakhimpur Kheri, Sultanpur, Mainpuri, Basti, Kannauj, Amroha and Bhadohi. New SPs have been posted there. There are six IPS officers who have been removed from one district and made SP in another district. Lakhimpur SP Ganesh Prasad Saha was removed on the complaint of MLAs. Sultanpur SP Somen Burma will now be the SP of

Mirzapur. Sankalp Sharma, who was posted as deputy commissioner of police in Lucknow Commissionerate, will now be the SP of Lakhimpur Kheri. Amroha SP Kunwar Anupam Singh will now take over the new responsibility as Sultanpur SP. Lakhimpur SP Ganesh Prasad Saha has been made the police chief of Mainpuri. Mirzapur SP Abhinandan will now be the new SP of Basti. Mainpuri SP Vinod Kumar has been given the responsibility of SP of Kannauj. Kannauj SP Amit Kumar Anand has been posted as SP in Amroha. Basant Lal will now serve as SP, Anti Corruption, Lucknow. Gopal Krishna Chaudhary has been given the responsibility of DCP Lucknow Police Commissionerate. Amit Kumar Anand will now be the new SP of Amroha. Abhimanyu

Manglik has been made Bhadohi of SP Vyom Bindal has been made in-charge SP of Saharanpur Nagar. Apart from this, the post which fell vacant after the retirement of SN Sabat from the post of Director General of Police CBCID on December 31 has now been given to Deepesh Juneja. He has been given the additional charge of DG Prosecution as well as DG CBCID. Recently, the transfer of Dr Sanjeev Gupta from Additional Director General of Police/Secretary, Home to Additional Director General of Police, Establishment, as well as GSO of Additional Director General of Police/Director General of Police/Director General of Police has been cancelled. Dr N Ravinder has been given the additional charge of DGP's GSO along with ADG Anti Corruption.

यूनियन बैंक Union Bank of India
A Government of India Undertaking

Regional Office : 117/H/1-240, Pandu Nagar, Kanpur
Head Office : 239, Vidhan Bhawan Marg, Nariman Point Mumbai

SALE NOTICE FOR SALE OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTIES | Date of e-Auction : 29-01-2025

E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable assets under the securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 Read with Proviso to Rule 8 (6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rule, 2002.

Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described immovable property mortgaged/charged to the secured creditor, the constructive possession of which has been taken by the authorized officer of **Union Bank of India** (Secured Creditor), will be sold on "As is Where is," "As is What is," and "Whatever there is" on the date mentioned below, for recovery of dues as mentioned hereunder to Union Bank of India from the below mentioned Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s). The Reserve Price & the Earnest Money Deposit or also mentioned hereunder.

Branch Name : Sadar Bazar, Jhansi • Address : 341-G, Sadar Bazar, Jhansi, Branch Head : Shri Naresh Ratnakar • Mob. : 9506849123

Borrower : Shri Subhash Chand S/o Shri Deep Chand & Smt. Rama Devi W/o Shri Subhash Chand and Shri Deep Chand S/o Shri Lala Ram, All R/o : 58, Idgah, Puliya No. 9, Near Power House, Tehsil & Distt. Jhansi. O/s Amount as per Demand Notice : Rs. 9,30,387.70 + Intt. + Other Charges

Property : Residential House No., 58, Idgah, Puliya No. 9, Distt. Jhansi. Owner of Property : Shri Deep Chand S/o Shri Lala Ram, Area : 61.68 Sq.Mtr., Bounded : North-Rasta 5 Ft., South : House of Ram Swaroop Kansoria, East-Kachha Rasta 10 Mtr., West : Rasta 5 Ft.

Date & Time of E-Auction : 29-01-2025 at 12.00 Noon to 5.00 pm

Reserve Price : Rs. 11,16,000/-, Earnest Money to be deposited Rs. 1,11,600/-. For detailed terms and condition of the sale, please refer to the link, provided in <https://www.unionbankofindia.co.in/english/TendelViewAllAuction.aspx>

Borrower : Shri Jaipal Singh S/o Shri Than Singh, R/o : Near Vipesh Inter College, Rashgarh, Jhansi, Guarantor : Shri Prabhu Dayal S/o Shri Ganesh Prasad, R/o : 538, Indra Nagar, BHEL, Jhansi. O/s Amount as per Demand Notice : Rs. 3,49,172.00 + Intt. + Other Charges

Property : Residential House Situated at Rashgarh, Jhansi. Owner of Property : Shri Jaipal Singh S/o Shri Than Singh, Area : 1296 Sq.Ft., Bounded : North-Plot of Garibey., South : 10 Ft. Wide Rasta, East-Plot of Seller, West : House of Devi & Jagdish

Date & Time of E-Auction : 29-01-2025 at 12.00 Noon to 5.00 pm

Reserve Price : Rs. 7,69,500/-, Earnest Money to be deposited Rs. 76,950/-. For detailed terms and condition of the sale, please refer to the link provided in <https://www.unionbankofindia.co.in/english/TendelViewAllAuction.aspx>

Branch Name : Nagar Nigam Jhansi • Address : Nagar Nigam Premises, Jhansi, Branch Head : Shri Shivam Gupta • Mob. : 9935157041

Borrower : Shri Shrif Bux S/o Mohd. Haneef & Smt. Nargis W/o Shri Sharif Bux and Mohd. Haneef S/o Shri Raheem Bux, All R/o : 111/1, Singara, Bhatta Gaon, Jhansi. Guarantor : Shri Suheb Khan S/o Shri Rasool Khan, R/o : 1/8, PWD Colony, Jhansi.

O/s Amount as per Demand Notice : Rs. 10,23,541.80 + Intt. + Other Charges

Property : Residential House situated at Part of Arazi No. 6, Mauza Singara, Bhatta Gaon, Distt. Jhansi. Owner of Property : Smt. Nargis W/o Shri Sharif Bux, Area : 1344 Sq. Ft., Bounded : North-Road, 15 Ft., South : Land of Ajeet, East-Plot of Mohd. Sahfeeq, West : Plot of Seller.

Date & Time of E-Auction : 29-01-2025 at 12.00 Noon to 5.00 pm

Reserve Price : Rs. 17,44,200/-, Earnest Money to be deposited Rs. 1,74,420/-. For detailed terms and condition of the sale, please refer to the link provided in <https://www.unionbankofindia.co.in/english/TendelViewAllAuction.aspx>

For Registration and Login and Bidding Rules visit <https://baanknet.com>

Date : 08-01-2025 Place : Jhansi Authorized Officer, Union Bank of India

Officials inspect Mela-related preparations

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

To provide security and proper amenities to the Mela (fair) passengers and devotees coming to the Maha Kumbh Mela-2025 to be held at Prayagraj Sangam, Additional General Manager (AGM) of North Eastern Railway (NER) Dinesh Kumar Singh, along with Divisional Railway Manager (DRM) Vineet Kumar Srivastava, on Wednesday inspected the management and passenger facility development works of Mela at Prayagraj Rambag and Jhusi railway stations of Varanasi division and reviewed the works done.

Singh also conducted a field inspection with the DRM for the security of fair passengers, first aid, information, ticketing and disaster management and confirmed the strong security arrangements. During his inspection, AGM reached Jhusi railway station by road and thoroughly inspected various preparations related to Mela at the station. He inspected the development works of the circulating area of the second entry gate of the station



NER AGM DK Singh inspecting security and other passenger arrangements for Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj on Wednesday.

and the passenger shelter centres built in this area, newly built modern toilets/ bathrooms for fair passengers, tea/food stalls, approach roads, RCC boundary walls built for security, high mast lights for proper lighting, fire extinguishers, LED screens, announcement speakers, CCTV cameras, security post, water booth, additional ticket counters and

automatic ticket vending machines built in the newly-built ticket offices and also tested them by getting tickets from the ATVM machine from the passengers. Singh also inspected the second foot over bridge built at the station, extended passenger sheds on platforms, station master room, control room equipped with various communication

systems, CCTV etc. He conducted a thorough inspection of the monitoring room, medical observation room equipped with modern equipment etc and directed to ensure deployment of all the concerned staff before the fair. He expressed happiness over the painting of Jhusi station and the artworks depicting Indian traditions including mythological stories in view of Maha Kumbh.

Later, the AGM inspected the Jhusi-Prayagraj Rambag rail section by motor trolley and reached Prayagraj Rambag station, testing the safety and operational speed of the rail section including the newly constructed major bridge number 111 on this rail section. He also conducted a thorough inspection of Prayagraj Rambag station to provide management of Kumbh Mela special trains and proper passenger facilities for the devotees. He also inspected the new passenger reservation centre, unreserved ticket counters, additional ticket counters, permanent passenger shelter centre, temporary food and water vending stalls, waiting rooms,

ATVMs, tea stalls, water booths, entry and exit routes, permanent and temporary platforms, passenger sheds, RCC benches, renovation of old foot over bridge, medical observation room, passenger and officer rest room, passenger waiting rooms, CCTV surveillance, main entrance, painting, ancient art paintings, barricading and four walls for security and control room for proper crowd management and passenger facility development works and gave guidelines to the concerned for crowd management. On the occasion Additional Divisional Railway Manager (ADRM/Infrastructure) Roshan Lal Yadav, Senior Divisional Engineer (SDE/Coordination) Rakesh Ranjan, Senior Divisional Commercial Manager (SDCM) Sheikh Rehman, Senior Divisional Engineer (SDE)-3 Anuj Verma, Senior Divisional Electrical Engineer (General) Pankaj Kesharwani, Senior Divisional Signal and Telecommunication Engineer-2 Yashveer Singh, Assistant Commercial Manager DK Singh and senior supervisors were present with him.

Fervour marks procession of three Ani Akharas

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The procession of the three Ani Akharas of Akhil Bhartiya Vaishnav was taken out from KP Ground with traditional fervour on Wednesday. A large number of saints came out riding on elephants, horses and camels. A large force was deployed for security arrangements. The procession of Akhil Bhartiya Shri Panch Nirmohi, Shri Panch Digambar and Shri Panch Nirvani Ani Akhara was taken out with religious fervour. With spears, swords, maces etc in their hands, the saints showcased their skills while chanting 'Jai Shri Ram' and 'Har Har Mahadev'. Extensive security arrangements were made in view of the procession. Crowds gathered on both sides of the road to see the procession (royal entry into the Mahakumbh area). Around 10,000 saints left for Sangam at 11 am on Wednesday. Saints demonstrated their skills at various places. They were welcomed with flower showers at various



Mahants and sadhus of Shri Panch Digambar Ani Akhara, Shri Panch Nirmohi Ani Akhara and Shri Panch Nirvani Ani Akhara on Wednesday taking part in the 'Chavni Praveshi', the royal entry procession for Maha Kumbh Mela 2025, towards Sangam in Prayagraj.

places. People also took selfies with the saints. Now these saints will do penance on the sands of Sangam. So far, processions of 10 akharas have been taken out. Mahamandaleshwar Saryu Das Maharaj of Digambar Ani Akhara said that the saints of all three akharas left for Maha Kumbh with full grandeur. Saints were walking ahead carrying the religious

flag of the akhara. Hanumanji, the deity of the akhara, was seated on the religious flag. The saints of Digambar Ani Akhara are identified by their white clothes, tilak and matted hair. They walk with a rosary in one hand and a spear in the other. Ani means group. The Digambar Ani Akhara was established in Ayodhya about 600 years ago to protect religion.

Crops of 26,643 farmers insured in current Rabi season

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The Central government has extended the last date for insurance under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) from December 31 to January 15 to cover more and more farmers. Non-loanee farmers can get their crops insured by submitting the photocopies of their Aadhar cards, latest Khatauni, bank pass-books (with IFSC code) and self-certified declaration of sowing, along with the premium part payable on the crop at the nearest Common Service Centres or bank branches. "The loanee farmers should contact their bank branches and ensure whether their crop has been insured by the bank

branch or not. If crop insurance has not been done till now, then inform the bank branch to get the insurance done as per rules", informed Chief Development Officer (CDO) Himanshu Nagpal adding that in the current Rabi season, so far 26,643 farmers have got their crops insured, which is 189 per cent progress compared to the last Rabi season.

He said that the farmers can get the crops notified for Rabi - wheat, gram, peas, lentils and potatoes insured. Under the scheme, insurance cover/compensation is provided to the insured farmers in case of damage to notified crops due to adverse weather conditions. Failure to sow the crop/unsuc-

cessful sowing, damage to the crop in the middle stage, damage to standing crops due to natural disasters, diseases, pests, hailstorm, waterlogging, cloud-burst, landslide, lightning, damage to the crop kept for drying in the field for the next 14 days after harvesting due to hailstorm, cyclone, unseasonal/cyclonic rain are covered. He informed that the government has issued a toll-free number- 14447 for the scheme, on which farmers can call and get detailed information about the scheme and insured farmers can inform the toll free number within 72 hours for compensation in case of disaster. He appealed to the farmers of the district to take advantage of the scheme.

Sewing machines distributed

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The Blind People's Association, Ahmedabad, and Arvind Mafatlal Foundation distributed sewing machines to 123 Divyang women after one month of training in the Janpad Pustakalaya auditorium in the LT College premises located in Orderly Bazaar. Along with this, Smart on AI glass was also distributed to 50 visually impaired students by ICEVI India, through which the visually impaired get help in reading, seeing objects and walking. The chief guest was District Magistrate S Rajalingam and special guest Chief Development Officer (CDO) Himanshu Nagpal were present in this programme. The major support in this pro-



DM S Rajalingam distributing sewing machine to a Divyang woman in Varanasi

gramme was the full cooperation of Bachpan Day Care Centre, District Divyang Welfare Department and Keshav Jalan (Chairman, Jalan Group) and International Council of Education and India Branch of Children of Visually Impaired.

Youth shot at due to rivalry

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Following old enmity, a youth was shot at by a local goon in Kalipahari village under Kotwali police station area of Mahoba on Tuesday night. His kin took him to the district hospital where doctors referred the youth to Medical College, Jhansi. Police have started a probe in the matter. According to a report, Kripa (19) of Kalipahari was standing at the door of his house on Tuesday night. Suddenly, a drunken goon reached there and started abusing him. On protest, he fired at Kripa with a countrymade pistol and escaped. As a result Kripa fell unconscious on the floor. His kin took him to the district hospital from where after first aid, he was referred to Jhansi Medical College. Kripa said after a debate with the assailant some time ago and the latter had developed enmity with him. Dr Yatindra Purwar at the Emergency Ward said the youth has a fracture in one hand. Police have started a probe. However, kin did not submit any complaint with the Kotwali police so far.

Programmes being run to reduce maternal mortality rate: CMO

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr Sandeep Chaudhary said that MDSR (Maternal Death Surveillance and Response) and Surakshit Matritva Aashwasan (SUMAN) programmes are being conducted to reduce maternal mortality rate in the district. The main objective of the programmes is to bring improvement at important levels by reviewing maternal deaths (at health unit, community and district level) and collecting detailed information about their causes and factors. According to Sample Registration System (SRS) 2018-20, the maternal mortality ratio of Uttar Pradesh is 167 per 1 lakh live births, which is expected to be reduced to less than 70 by the year 2030 under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), said the CMO, adding that the causes of death of pregnant women are investigated in MDSR and after understanding the reason, improvement is done in malnutrition and free and quick ambulance and medical services. He said emphasis is being laid on 100 per cent reporting of maternal deaths by reviewing them at block and district level. "ASHA workers will report the causes of death of pregnant women. Whether this death has happened in the hospital or at home or on the way. While auditing all, the deficiencies found are improved. After the information of death, the causes of death are

reviewed. To find out this, a team of doctors goes to the house of the pregnant woman to investigate the cause of death," he said.

Deputy Chief Medical Officer and Nodal Officer (RCH) Dr HC Maurya said that under the SUMAN programme, on giving information of maternal death at the community level through 104 Health Helpline web portal, the first informant will be given ₹1,000 per community based maternal death.

Under the first information provider, ASHA, Anganwadi worker, any person from Panchayati Raj Department and any person from the community (except any officer/worker related to the health department) can receive this incentive amount.

Dr Maurya said that ASHA workers and ANMs will first give information about the death in their area at ANM centres and community health centres (CHCs) through form one. The information will be recorded in the block register in form two. In form three, the superintendent will verify the death and first investigate the reasons. In form four, the death at the hospital and sub-health center will be recorded. The process of filling form five will be completed within 21 days of death. In this, three people, including the doctor, will go to the pregnant woman's house and investigate the reasons of death. A complete report of the reasons of death will be filled in form six, he informed.

Importance of holistic development & knowledge sharing underscored

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

A lecture in memory of Thakur Ratanpal Singh, principal donor of the Faculty of Commerce in Banaras Hindu University (BHU) was organised at the Faculty of Commerce on Tuesday. Its theme was 'Viksit Bharat @ 2047: Managerial Challenges and Opportunities'. Dean of Commerce Faculty Prof HK Singh welcomed the guests and described the historical perspective of independent India and suggested initiating the Indian management system and making education system effective to transform developing India to Viksit Bharat (developed India). The chief guest and Pro-Chancellor of GLA University (Mathura) Prof Durg Singh Chauhan deliberated on the theme of Viksit Bharat and stressed upon the

development of attributes that lead to out-of-the-box thinking. He also stressed that all the stakeholders of the society should stand together and by others for accomplishing the goal of becoming a developed nation. Ex-Vice-Chancellor of Shankaracharya University (Bhilai) Prof Sadanand Shahi focused on the congruence of tradition and innovation to achieve the sustainable development goals. Prof OP Rai touched upon the requirement of designing the curriculum to facilitate skill development in the education system to come closer to the goal of Viksit Bharat. Chairperson NEP Implementation Committee, BHU, Prof Madhoolika Agrawal asserted that holistic development and knowledge sharing are the pre-requisites to fulfil the goal of India

being a developed nation by properly imbibing the deep rooted legacy and its inheritance. Ex-MLA of Baiswara (Rae Bareilly) SB Singh recalled the contribution of his philanthropic father Thakur Ratanpal Singh in the uplift of the society at large. Ex-VC of Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapeeth (MGKV) Dr Prithvish Nag laid thrust on the blend of scientific innovations and cultural heritage as the gateway to Viksit Bharat. The event was organised by Dr Meenakshi A Singh. Prof Priyanka Gite proposed the vote of thanks. On the occasion Prof OP Singh, Prof FB Singh, Prof D Sahu, Prof SC Das, Dr Lal Baboo Jaiswal, Dr Meenakshi A Singh, Dr Ishi Mohan, Dr Anchal Singh and others were present. **WORKSHOP:** The Banaras Hindu University (BHU) will be hosting the first region-wise

workshop on 'Integration and Implementation of SWAYAM affiliated colleges' at Swatantra Bhawan, on Thursday.

This outreach workshop, initiated by MoE and UGC, is the first of its kind to be organised by BHU in the upcoming series of workshops scheduled from January to March 2025. It aims to discuss the successful implementation of SWAYAM courses in the universities of UP, Haryana and Delhi, thereby increasing student participation for credit accumulation and facilitating interdisciplinary academics. The workshop will aim to raise awareness among universities and colleges about how to adopt MOOC courses through the SWAYAM platform, including providing a framework for universities to conduct examinations for these courses.

Musical performance captivates audience

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

NTPC Auraiya organised a cultural evening which was attended by chief guest Abhay Kumar Srivastava, Head of Project and Anupama Srivastava, President of Jagriti Mahila Mandal. The evening featured an enchanting musical performance. Their captivating performance resonated with the audience, creating an unforgettable experience. The programme also included remarkable dance performances that highlighted the rich cultural diversity within the NTPC Auraiya community. This cultural evening not only celebrated the festive spir-



Chief guest Head of NTPC Auraiya Project Abhay Kumar Srivastava addressing the audience at cultural evening.

it but also strengthened bonds within the NTPC Auraiya family, making it a truly memorable occasion. **FELICITATED:** The members of All India Swarnkar Samaj

Evam Jewellers' Association while felicitating the DCP (Central) Dinesh Tripathi for working out the burglary in a jeweller's house and shop in Nawabganj, urged him to pro-

Knp Metro installs automatic fare collection gates

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Kanpur Metro installed automatic fare collection (AFC) gates at four of the five stations. The AFC system is essential for smooth metro travel. It includes AFC gates, ticket vending machines (TVMs) and ticket office machines (TOMs). The installation of these systems is progressing swiftly from Chunniganj to Kanpur Central Station. AFC gates have already been installed at Chunniganj, Naveen Market, Bada Chauraha and Kanpur Central with installation at Nayaganj station still underway. The AFC gates allow passengers to scan QR codes on their tickets for entry into the paid area. After reaching their destination, passengers scan their tickets again for exit. A total of twelve AFC gates (six for entry and as many for exit) have been installed at Chunniganj, Naveen Market, Bada Chauraha and Kanpur Central stations. At Nayaganj station total 11 AFC gates (five for entry and six for exit) is being installed. Passengers can choose from QR code tickets or NCMC Go Smart cards for metro travel. Tickets are available at TOM rooms or TVMs at stations. Additionally, Kanpur Metro's official mobile app allows passengers to buy tickets from home. Available on both Android and iOS, the 'Kanpur Metro' app generates a QR code for scanned entry at AFC gates upon booking, facilitating a smooth travel experience. UPMRC Managing Director Sushil Kumar along with senior officials, including Director of Works & Infrastructure CP



Singh, Director of Rolling Stock Naveen Kumar and other department heads, visited the under construction Kanpur Metro stations.

The visit began at Naubasta station and included visits to Chunniganj, Buddha Nagar, Baradevi, Kanpur Central, Nayaganj, Bada Chauraha, and Naveen Market. He commended the progress of the construction work, stating, "The Kanpur Metro team's pace of work is impressive. Systems such as tunnel ventilation, third rail and escalators have been installed from Chunniganj to Kanpur Central. Recently, we successfully conducted a test run of the metro train from Moti Jheel to Kanpur Central. In the coming days, regular trial runs will continue to Kanpur Central. Along with underground construction, road restoration work above ground is also progressing rapidly. The Baradevi-Naubasta elevated section is advancing quickly and tunnel construction for corridor-1 and corridor-2 is also proceeding on schedule. Our team remains dedicated to expanding passenger service from IIT to Kanpur Central, and we are confident that this momentum will ensure timely completion of all projects."

Terracotta pottery workshop focuses on advanced techniques

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Ranjit Singh Rozi Shiksha Kendra (RSK) is hosting a terracotta pottery workshop for potters from Kanpur Nagar and Kanpur Dehat at the IIT Kanpur from January 6 to 11. It features 25 participants from Bithoor, Baikunthpur, Mandhana and Pachaurh of Kanpur Nagar as well as Sarvankhera and Pukhrayan of Kanpur Dehat. The workshop is being led by Prof Manoj Prajapati, a distinguished expert in terracotta pottery and sculpting from Visva Bharti University, Santiniketan, Kolkata.



Prof Prajapati, a native of Kanpur, is guiding participants on advanced techniques such as slabbing and coiling, alongside practical methods for constructing low-cost, efficient furnaces for firing pottery. The sessions also cover modern glazing processes aimed at enhancing the quality and

market appeal of products, enabling potters to better align their craft with evolving consumer preferences. Rita Singh, coordinator of activities at RSK, said, "The centre is connected with over 100 potters in Kanpur with the goal of placing the city on the pottery map of the state. This workshop aims to introduce new design thinking and improved processes that will help the potters create products that are more attractive to consumers." During the inauguration, Prof Sandeep Sangal, Principal Investigator of RSK, encouraged the potters to make the most of this learning opportunity and integrate modern techniques into their traditional practices. Prof Prajapati will

be guiding participants in exploring various pottery techniques and materials, including hands-on sessions to create items on the wheel tailored to their individual skill levels. His enthusiasm and encouragement motivated the artisans, assuring them that the new techniques are not only easy to adopt but also beneficial in elevating the quality and market appeal of their craft. This initiative by the RSK aims to bridge the gap between traditional artistry and modern market demands. By nurturing skill development and innovation, it ensures a sustainable future for Kanpur's rich pottery heritage while empowering potters to thrive in the evolving marketplace.

IIT(BHU) alumnus donates musical instruments

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The 1984 alumni batch of IIT (BHU) has made a remarkable contribution to the institute by donating musical instruments worth over ₹3.5 lakh. This generous donation, which includes guitars, keyboards, amplifiers and other modern musical equipment, was pledged during their 40th reunion to enhance the cultural and musical experiences of current students. TS Ramesh (CHE '84), a prominent member of the batch, said the donation serves as a tribute to the 17 batch mates who are

no longer with the alumni group, honouring their memory and keeping their spirit alive within the IIT (BHU) community. These instruments are expected to play a pivotal role in nurturing the musical talent of students, encouraging creativity and cultural growth. Ramesh was warmly welcomed by Prof Rajesh Kumar (Dean of Student Affairs) and Prof Akhileendra Pratap Singh (Cultural Council Counsellor) at the Students' Gymkhana. During the event, Ramesh was felicitated for the 1984 batch's philanthropic gesture. In a heartfelt moment, the 1984 alumni batch of the institute per-

formed the Kulgeet and presented a fusion of both Indian and Western music, creating a memorable experience that highlighted the occasion. IIT (BHU) Director Prof Amit Patra expressed his gratitude for the 1984 batch's support. He emphasised the vital role such donations play in creating an enriching environment for students, fostering both academic and creative growth. "This thoughtful contribution not only strengthens the alumni's ties to the institute but also inspires the current and future generations of students to explore their creative potential", he said.

India and EU reaffirm commitment to democracy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India and the European Union (EU) on Wednesday reaffirmed their commitment to principles and values of democracy, rule of law and human rights and agreed on the need to safeguard freedom and diversity of civil society actors. The issues were extensively discussed here at the 11th India-EU Human Rights Dialogue.

The two sides discussed the issues related to civil and political rights, social, economic, and cultural rights, countering religious hatred, elimination of discrimination in all its manifestations, freedom of religion or belief, freedom of expression and opinion, both online and offline, a joint readout said. While the EU reiterated its opposition to capital punishment, India reiterated its stand on recognition of the right to development as a "distinct, universal, inalienable and fundamental human right," it said.



India is among few countries that still have death penalty. "During the dialogue, India and the EU reiterated their commitment to the shared principles and values of democracy, freedom, rule of law, and to the promotion and protection of all human rights," the readout said. The two sides emphasised the "universality, indivisibility, interdependence and interrelatedness" of all human rights,

it added. "Reflecting their commitment to upholding human rights, they both agreed on the need to safeguard the freedom, independence and diversity of civil society actors and organisations and other relevant stakeholders such as journalists, respecting freedom of association, expression and peaceful assembly," the readout said. The two sides also delved into issues of the 'LGBTQI+' com-

munity, women empowerment and issues relating to technology and human rights.

The two sides also exchanged views on the rights of migrants and business and human rights, according to the readout.

"India and the EU recognised the importance of strengthening national and international human rights mechanisms for the protection and promotion of human rights," it said. Both sides underlined the importance of enhancing cooperation in the multilateral fora particularly at the UN General Assembly and the UN Human Rights Council, it said. "In this regard, they committed to closer cooperation and more regular exchanges between the Permanent Missions of India and the EU in Geneva, in order to identify further opportunities for joint action," the readout added.

The two sides also discussed cooperation on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief in accordance with international humanitarian law.

Will Didi tweak or not tweak land policy

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

With her state heavy in debt, hard up for liquidity, lacking in investment and lagging in job-creation --- thanks to her social security schemes that too is reaching a saturation point --- Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is taking this year's Bengal Global Business Summit seriously so as to draw investment proposals ahead of the next year's Assembly elections. The Chief Minister who was on Wednesday scheduled to hold a review meeting with senior bureaucrats including the State Chief Secretary and other senior officials is willing to go the extra mile to attract investment but does not however want to tweak her 'no-acquisition' land policy in order to invite business. The BGBS is scheduled to be held in the first week of February, sources said. "Investment has dried up ... though there are some coming in trickles these are not enough to create job ... on the other hand the Government has withheld appointment to more than 5 lakh sanctioned posts --- in order to pay for her populist social security schemes ... this

has shrunk the employment opportunity further ... forcing Bengal to the ranks of a 'migrant labour state'" said a leading economist who was once a close confidant of the Chief Minister.

With a steady decline in investment and flight of capital the State's debt burden has climbed to about Rs 6 lakh crores from Rs 1.92 lakh crore left by the Left Government after 34 years of their rule in 2011.

According to a former Chief Secretary who had worked both with the Left and the TMC Governments, "Jyoti Basu had realized the importance of investment and that not all investors are the agents of imperialist forces in the closing years of his rule while Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee zealously but unsuccessfully tried big investment before losing power to the Trinamool Congress ... but Mamata Banerjee is not ready to understand that industries do not happen in thin air ... they need land ... and whatever investment that are coming are taking place on the lands acquired by the previous Government."

and prospective investors have repeatedly requested the Chief Minister to acquire land for them but she is reluctant to do so for the fear of losing power, the retired officer said.

According to political pundits BGBS-2025 assumes significance for the Chief Minister in view of the 2026 Assembly elections. "Though she coined the words 'Bengal means business' it has hardly come true ... BGBD this year will be a golden opportunity for the Chief Minister to send a message both to the industry fraternity as well as the common voters that her government is really interested in offering an industry-friendly environment in the state ... if she wants to blunt BJP's arguments on the so-called Gujarat model," said a city-based a Jadavpur professor and political scientist.

BGBS is a brainchild of the Chief Minister and is organized every year with much fanfare partaken by Indian industry captains like the Tatas, Ambanis, Adanis, Mirchandanis, Goenkas et al. Foreign investors to join the gala business event dangling investment proposals that hardly materialize.

"The reason is simple first you have to provide land, then streamline law and order and stop Tolabazi (extortion) and provide politics-free environment ... the Chief Minister wants investment but whether it is possible for her to ensure the three conditions is a big question mark because these would hurt the Trinamool Congress' raison d'etre ... she created a fake land movement with the help of some media captains but now she has got entangled in her own trap," said Sujan Chakrabarty a senior CPI(M) leader.

"The Chief Minister wants the investors to acquire lands but where the land-holding is highly fragmented no investor will be ready to bear the trouble of interacting with individual landowners and setting up big industries... Besides she also has to revisit her no-SEZ stance because the Information Technology Enabled Services (ITeS) sector depends on SEZ," said the former Chief Secretary wondering whether her officers will be able to drive home their point to her or they will simply tow the line that she tosses at them.

India reaffirms support for Maldives' defence readiness

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India and Maldives on Wednesday reaffirmed readiness to enhance bilateral relationship towards 'Comprehensive Economic and Maritime Security Partnership', during talks between Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and his counterpart Mohammed Ghassan Maumoon.

The two ministers comprehensively reviewed various aspects of bilateral defence and security cooperation. During the talks, both sides reasserted the firm commitment to work closely in realising the joint vision for India-Maldives Comprehensive Economic and Maritime Security Partnership. Rajnath Singh reaffirmed India's readiness to support the Maldives in capability enhancement for defence preparedness, including provisioning of defence platforms and assets to augment its capacities, as per its national priorities and in line with New Delhi's 'Neighborhood First' policy and the vision of SAGAR (Security And Growth for All in the Region).

Minister Maumoon appreciated India's historical role as the 'First Responder' for the Maldives, and thanked New



Delhi for assisting Male in augmenting the modern infrastructural capacities and training of defence and security personnel. On the Government of Maldives' request, India handed over defence equipment and stores to the Maldives. Minister Maumoon is on his first official visit to India. The visit is part of continued high-level engagements between the two sides. It has provided an opportunity to further deepen the bilateral defence and security ties for the mutual benefit of the two countries and the Indian Ocean Region. Maumoon is on a three-day visit to India, nearly eight months after New Delhi completed pulling out its military personnel from the Maldives following a demand by its pro-China President Mohamed Muizzu. The overall episode had significantly frayed the ties between the two nations.

India, Afghanistan discuss various issues pertaining to bilateral relations

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India and Afghanistan on Wednesday discussed various issues pertaining to bilateral relations as well as regional developments during talks between Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and Afghanistan Acting Foreign Minister Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi, in Dubai, Ministry of External Affairs(MEA) said here.

Giving details, MEA statement said the Foreign Secretary underlined India's historic friendship with the Afghan people and the strong people to people contacts between the two countries. In this context, he conveyed India's readiness to respond to the urgent developmental needs of the Afghan people.

The two sides evaluated the ongoing Indian humanitarian assistance programmes. The Afghan Minister appreciated and thanked the Indian leadership for continuing to engage and support the people of Afghanistan. In view of the current need for development activities, it was decided that India would consider engaging in development projects in the near future, in addition to the



ongoing humanitarian assistance programme.

It may be recalled that in response to the needs of the Afghan people, India decided to extend humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan.

India has so far dispatched several shipments consisting of 50,000 MTs of wheat, 300 tons of medicines, 27 tons of earthquake relief aid, 40,000 litres of pesticides, 100 million polio doses, 1.5 million doses of COVID Vaccine, 11,000 units of hygiene kits for the drug addiction programme, 500 units of winter clothing and 1.2 tons of stationary kits. In response to the request from the Afghan side, India will

provide further material support in the first instance to the health sector and for the rehabilitation of refugees. The two sides also discussed strengthening of sports (cricket) cooperation, which is highly valued by the young generation of Afghanistan. It was also agreed to promote the use of Chabahar port for supporting trade and commercial activities, including for the purpose of humanitarian assistance for Afghanistan. The Afghan side underlined its sensitivities to India's security concerns. The two sides agreed to remain in touch and continue regular contacts at various levels.

J and K legislators to attend a three-day long orientation programme

PNS ■ JAMMU

The newly elected members of the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly are all set to attend a three-day-long Orientation programme from Thursday to learn Parliamentary practices, procedures and conduct of business rules in the House.

The orientation programme will be conducted at the Central Hall of J&K Legislative Assembly Complex, Jammu. The programme is being organised by J&K Legislative Assembly Secretariat in collaboration with PRIDE, Lok Sabha Secretariat.

The ninety (90) Member House presently has eighty-eight (88) members, of which, fifty (50) members have been elected for the first time. In order to help the newly elected members effectively discharge their onerous responsibilities of meeting the aspirations of the people, this three-day orientation program is being held on Parliamentary Practices, Procedures and Conduct of Business in the House.

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, Speaker J&K Legislative Assembly Abdul Rahim Rather,



Deputy Chief Minister are expected to attend the inaugural program.

The first Legislative Assembly of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir was constituted on 8th October 2024. The orientation programme will feature discussions by eminent Parliamentarians like Dr. Sanjay Jaiswal, Chairperson, Committee on Estimates; N.K. Premachandran and Dr. Satayapal Singh, former Members Lok Sabha. The subjects to be discussed and deliberated during the programme included Legislative Processes, Budgetary Process, Executive Accountability through Questions, Committee System

and Information Support to Legislators, Do's and Don'ts for an Effective Legislator and a session on NEVA.

The insights gained through these lectures will provide the newly elected members with a deep understanding of the workings of the legislature and the responsibility they carry as elected representatives. The lectures will also be co-hosted by Senior Officers of the Lok Sabha Secretariat.

This programme is expected to enhance the capacity of MLAs to significantly contribute to policy formulation and ensure its effective implementation for the greater good of the Union Territory.

Undertrials to be released if they have undergone half the maximum prison term

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Centre has asked all states to ensure that an undertrial prisoner arrested for an offence for which the punishment of death or life imprisonment has not been specified should be released if he or she has already undergone detention for half of the maximum prison term specified for that offence, thus reducing overcrowding in jails. In a communication to chief secretaries and directors general of prisons of all states, the ministry of home affairs said the prison authorities should approach the court concerned for release of such eligible prisoners under the provisions of the Section 479 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (BNSS).

The Section 479 of the BNSS states that when a person has, during the period of investigation, inquiry or trial of an offence under any law (not being an offence for which the punishment of death or life imprisonment has been specified as one of the punishments under that law) undergone detention for a period extending up to one-half of the maximum period of imprisonment specified for that offence under that law, he shall be released by the court on bail.

"In case of first-time offenders, such prisoners shall be released on bond by the court, if they have undergone detention for a period extending up to one-third of the maximum period of imprisonment for that offence. Further, Section 479 (3) of the BNSS casts a specific responsibility on the Superintendent of the Prison to make an application to the



concerned court for release of aforementioned undertrial prisoners on bail/bond," the communication said. The ministry said it had issued an advisory to the states and union territories on the issue on October 16, 2024 and had requested them to provide the benefit of the provisions of Section 479 of BNSS to all eligible prisoners and have their bail applications filed in the court accordingly.

It said on the occasion of Constitution Day i.e. November 26, 2024, the home ministry had launched a special campaign under which all the states and union territories were requested... To identify eligible prisoners under the provisions of the Section 479 of BNSS and move their applications to the concerned courts for their release on bail/bond. Union Home Minister Amit Shah had also sent a letter to chief ministers of all states and Union territories in this regard. The states and Union territories had actively participated in this exercise and had furnished the details of the number of prisoners who benefitted from the provisions of Section 479 of BNSS up to November 26, 2024.

However, the ministry has conveyed to the states that it was not a one-time exercise and the states and Union territories need to take advantage of the provisions of Section 479 of BNSS and provide the benefit of the same to all eligible prisoners on a continuous basis. "The states and UTs are requested to provide details, as in the attached proforma, for the period November 27, 2024 to December 31, 2024, on urgent basis, whereafter a monthly report, even a NIL report, is to be provided to this ministry in the prescribed proforma, starting from January 1, 2025," the communication said. The home minister said the provisions of Section 479 of BNSS can go a long way in mitigating the situation of long detention faced by undertrial prisoners and can also address the issue of overcrowding in prisons.

"It is, therefore, expected that all states and UTs will cooperate in the matter and will advise the concerned prison authorities for taking necessary action in the matter and to furnish the desired information to MHA in a timely manner," it said.

62 indigenously manufactured vehicles set to reach Lebanon

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a boost for 'Make in India' initiative, 62 indigenously manufactured vehicles are set to reach Lebanon for utilisation by the Indian contingent deployed in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), defence sources said on Wednesday.

The fleet comprises high mobility troop carriage vehicles, utility vehicles (one tonne and 2.5 tonne), medium and light ambulances, fuel bowlers and recovery vehicles, they said. Until now, the Indian troops serving in the UN peacekeeping mission in Lebanon were operating the vehicles provided by the United Nations. These vehicles were sourced from other countries, a defence source said. In a significant step towards promoting indigenous capabilities and strengthening operational efficiency, 62 Indian-manufactured vehicles are now set to reach Lebanon for utilisation by the Indian contingent deployed in the UNIFIL, the source added.

With the induction of these 'Made-in-India' vehicles, the Indian battalion will now rely on "robust and homegrown platforms", showcasing India's commitment to self-reliance and its growing defence manufacturing capabilities on the global stage, the source said. This development underscores India's leadership in peacekeeping missions and highlights the nation's support for indigenous innovation in defence, he added.

UGC's draft regulations 2025 direct assault on State rights, says CPI(M)

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) on Wednesday said the University Grants Commission's draft regulations 2025 contains a provision which is a "direct assault" on State rights on the question of selecting Vice-Chancellors (VCs) for State-run Universities, and demanded that it should be withdrawn. The new guidelines give the Governor, who is also the Chancellor of State Universities, the power to appoint a committee to select the vice-chancellor, the CPI(M) Politburo said in a statement, claiming that it is happening in the backdrop of governors "arbitrarily" appointing VCs in some "opposition-ruled states".

"The draft UGC regulations 2025 contains a provision which is a direct assault on the rights of states on the question of selecting vice-chancellors in state-run universities," the statement said. "The guidelines give the governor-cum-chancellor the power to appoint a three-member selection committee in which the chancellor's nominee will also be the chairperson. This is happening in the backdrop of governors acting arbitrarily in appointing vice-chancellors in some opposition-ruled states," the CPI(M) said. Claiming that the State Government will have no say as to who all will be appointed in the selection committee, the



CPI(M) said, "At one stroke, the Centre through these guidelines can appoint vice-chancellors of its choice in all state-run universities through the governor-cum-chancellors." The Left party also said the draft regulations violate the Constitutional position, where education is a concurrent subject. "All democratic sections, including the non-BJP state governments, should unitedly oppose this dangerous provision. It should be withdrawn," they said. The draft UGC (Minimum Qualifications for Appointment & Promotion of Teachers and Academic Staff in Universities and Colleges and Measures for Maintenance of Standards in Higher Education) Regulations, 2025, was released on Monday. The draft guidelines, which have been placed in the public domain for feedback, aim to give flexibility to the Universities in appointing and promoting teachers and academic staff in their institutions. The draft regulations grant Governors broader control over VC appointments and allows non-academics to hold these posts.

India's defence forces planning to build integrated communication satellite grid



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India's defence forces are planning to build an integrated satellite communication grid comprising spacecraft in different orbits and data relay systems as space emerges as a new domain of warfare, a senior officer said.

Addressing the DefSat Conference here, Defence Space Agency Director General Air Vice Marshal Pawan Kumar said the defence forces were also looking at collaborating with the industry to meet its requirements to get an edge over its rivals in the domain.

"When you talk of communication, I think the technology that we are focusing on is integrated satellite communication grid. We don't want any service to be over dependent on a particular satellite," Kumar said in the inaugural address at the DefSat conference organised by Satcom Industry Association-India. Kumar said the defence forces were looking at a mix of constellations, either Medium

Earth Orbit (MEO)-Geostationary Orbit (GEO) or Low Earth Orbit (LEO)-MEO-GEO, and a lot of studies have happened on that.

"We are also looking at tracking and data relay satellite systems primarily because it reduces demand to delivery time as far as OODA loop is concerned," he said. Kumar said the defence forces were also exploring quantum communications because of the obvious advantages of secrecy.

"We are looking for space and ground-based sensors which include telescopes and radars, along with the complete network so that the commanders can make appropriate decisions, whether it is military level, operational level, or tactical level," he said. The inaugural session of the three-day conference was addressed by Lt Gen PJS Panu (retd); Viasat India Managing Director Gautam Sharma; Data Security Council India CEO Vinayak Godse; President SIA-India and CMD Ananth Technologies Subba Rao Pavuluri.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Brace up for battle royal

With polling scheduled for February 5, Delhi is poised for a fiercely contested three-way battle

As the Election Commission officially announced the schedule for Delhi's upcoming assembly elections, the stage is set for what promises to be a hard-fought, three-cornered contest. Polling for the 70 assembly seats in Delhi will take place on February 5, with the results to be declared on February 8. This election is poised to be a high-stakes battle between the incumbent Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Congress, each bringing its own strategies, narratives and issues to the forefront. Under the leadership of Arvind Kejriwal, AAP is looking to secure a third consecutive term in Delhi. The party, which has enjoyed overwhelming success in the last two elections, is fiercely campaigning for a 'hat-trick.' Kejriwal, whose party has transformed the political landscape of Delhi since its formation in 2012, is betting on his track record of governance and what he calls the 'politics of work.' AAP's focus remains on welfare programmes such as free electricity, water and healthcare, while the party claims its tenure has been marked by development and transparency. With the slogan "Phir layenge Kejriwal," AAP has launched a campaign centred around a positive vision for the future, contrasting its achievements with the BJP's focus on divisive politics. However, AAP's victory is far from assured. Despite its dominance in the previous two elections, the party now faces mounting challenges. AAP has been dogged by corruption allegations, a point of attack that the BJP has effectively capitalised on. For the BJP, this election is a do-or-die contest. The party, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has mounted an aggressive campaign aimed at ousting Kejriwal and the AAP from power. The BJP's central theme revolves around anti-incumbency, accusing AAP of corruption and failing to address the capital's development needs. Prime Minister Modi, at the forefront of the BJP's attack, has called the AAP government an 'AAP-da' (disaster) and criticised its inability to offer a vision for Delhi's growth. Modi's rhetoric positions the BJP as the party of national progress, while framing Kejriwal's leadership as an obstacle to Delhi's future. The BJP's strategy is two-fold: discredit the AAP's governance while appealing to voters' desire for change. The Congress, once the dominant force in Delhi, is now a distant third. After losing power in the capital in 2013, the party has been trying to rebuild its political base, which has been severely eroded by both AAP and BJP. However, this time the party is determined to make its presence felt in the elections. Given the deepening polarisation, high stakes and aggressive strategies on all sides, the 2025 Delhi Assembly elections are shaping up to be a politically charged, hard-fought, and closely contested battle. Voters will have to choose between a legacy of governance under AAP, a vision for change from the BJP, and the prospect of stability from the Congress, making this election one of the most bitterly fought yet interesting to the core.



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PICTALK



A man and children perform for alms at Sagar Island on a foggy winter morning, in South 24 Parganas

Influencer marketing is making a big impact on India's small towns

Influencer marketing, once seen as an urban phenomenon, is now making waves in India's small towns and rural areas

Influencer marketing is no longer just a big-city thing in India. It has taken even the country's small towns and rural areas. The sole reason behind this shift is the recent surge in regional content creators, who connect deeply with local audiences by speaking their language, both literally and culturally.

The rise in regional content
A regional revolution is on the cards for India's digital landscape. The share of regional language consumption on OTT platforms alone is estimated to go beyond 50-50 per cent by 2025, leaving Hindi content behind. This is to say, India's appetite for content in native languages is growing aggressively, laying down a strong foundation for regional influencers to thrive.

Brands tapping into 'Bharat'
Brands seem to acknowledge this shift and have begun increasingly collaborating with regional influencers to penetrate non-metro markets. There's no argument over how crucial influencer marketing has become for



brands, with 75 per cent of brands considering it a part of their marketing strategy. Partnering with local creators gives an edge to brands in delivering messages that resonate with regional audiences and build engagement and trust.

Enter micro & nano influencers
Brands are going big on micro and nano influencers, given their unmatched effectiveness in these markets. Their content is more relatable and trustworthy to local audiences. Notably, 47 per cent of brands prefer collaborating with micro and nano influencers for cost-effective campaigns and better engagement.

Economic opportunities for regional creators
The creator economy is ris-

ing rapidly. The market size is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 22 per cent from 2023 to 2030. This growth rate is proof of the plethora of opportunities that lie for regional creators, enabling them to monetise their content while contributing to the local economy. Despite the promising growth, challenges remain. Many creators in smaller towns may need more access to high-quality production resources or brand partnerships. However, as the digital infrastructure improves and brands continue to recognise the value of regional influencers, these hurdles are likely to go away. The rise of regional content creators is reshaping India's influencer

marketing ecosystem. By tapping into local languages and cultures, these influencers are not only taking brand messages to their target audience but also democratising content creation across the nation. The rise of regional content creators is transforming India's influencer marketing landscape. By connecting with local audiences in their native languages and cultures, these influencers are expanding the reach of brands to non-metro markets. As regional content consumption grows, brands are increasingly partnering with micro and nano influencers to achieve cost-effective, relatable, and trustworthy engagement. The growing creator economy offers significant economic opportunities, despite challenges like limited access to production resources. As digital infrastructure improves, regional influencers will continue to thrive, reshaping content creation and broadening its reach across the nation. (The writer is Founder and CEO iCubesWire; views expressed are personal)



SAHIL CHOPRA

Donald Trump's H-1B dilemma

As President-elect Donald Trump prepares for his second term, the debate over H-1B visas for skilled foreign workers is heating up

As the US President-elect Donald Trump prepares to take office on January 20, he faces a unique challenge. The issue of immigration and the H-1B visa has become a contentious point among the two key groups. He is trying to satisfy the conflicting interests of the billionaire tech community, who heavily fund his campaigns, and his 'America First' base.

Trump's recent favourable statements on H-1B visas for foreign skilled workers have sparked renewed discussions on the future of this critical programme. The New York Post quoted Trump, "I've always liked the visas, I have always been in favour of the visas. That's why we have them." He added: "I have many H-1B visas on my properties. I've been a believer in H-1B visas. I have used it many times. It's a great program."

Trump admitted, Trump has backed Elon Musk and his other wealthy funders from Silicon Valley (South Africa-born Musk had an H-1B visa himself). While tech leaders want a liberal H-1B visa regime, 'America First' hardliners wish for stricter restrictions on immigration at all levels. In his first term, Trump prioritised protecting American citizens' interests, which had significant implications on the H-1B visas. 'America First' advocates argue that H-1B visas take jobs away from American workers. The looming question is, will the Trump's second term may prioritise American workers' jobs, or it could revert to the traditional Republican belief that immigration primarily benefits employers. Debates arose over H-1B visas following Trump's appointment of India-born Sriram Krishnan as his advisor on artificial intelligence. It caused divisions within Trump's team—opponents of the H-1B visa claim that the immigrants take away American jobs. The intriguing question is whether a second Trump term will prioritise jobs for American workers or revert to the traditional Republican stance that immigration is pri-



marily beneficial for employers. Influential supporters like Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy argue that H-1B visas are crucial for addressing the US engineers shortage. Musk, who built his empire, and Vivek Ramaswamy have strongly supported the program. Musk expressed his readiness to go to war over it. They highlight a significant skills gap in the US labour market, particularly in STEM fields.

What is an H-1B visa, and why is there such controversy surrounding it? Would India suffer if H-1B visas were eliminated? The visa system for skilled workers from other countries was introduced in 1990 by President Bush to work legally in the US. The visa is for three years. Applicants must have a job lined up with a US-based sponsoring company or institution. Since 2004, the United States has limited the number of new H-1B visas to 85,000 yearly.

This cap includes 20,000 visas for international students with advanced degrees from US universities. In the fiscal year 2023, the US approved just over 386,000 H-1B applications. For the fiscal year 2024, there were 758,994 eligible registrations, an increase from 474,421 in 2023. Most approved applicants work in



MAJOR US COMPANIES, INCLUDING TECH GIANTS LIKE AMAZON AND GOOGLE, ARE SIGNIFICANTLY SCALING BACK THEIR SPONSORSHIP OF H-1B VISAS. INDIAN IT FIRMS, INCLUDING INFOSYS AND TATA CONSULTANCY SERVICES (TCS), ALSO RECORDED SUBSTANTIAL REDUCTIONS

science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). The issue is more than just an economic concern; new developments in artificial intelligence and advanced computing technology make it vital for US defence and national security. India receives approximately 72 per cent of H-1B visas, while Chinese citizens account for around 12 per cent.

Eliminating country-specific caps could increase job opportunities for Indians in the United States. It is a significant concern for many prospective applicants. Major employers in the tech industry, including Indian companies like Infosys, TCS, HCL, and Wipro, represent 35 per cent of the top 10 beneficiaries of H-1B visas. Beginning with FY 2025, USCIS changed from an employer-based to a beneficiary-centric registration system, following the agency's "serious concerns" noted after the FY 2024 registration period. Amazon, the largest H-1B sponsor, saw a steep decline in approvals, dropping from over 11,000 in 2023 to just above 9,000 in 2024. Major US companies, including tech giants like Amazon and Google, are significantly scaling back their sponsorship of H-1B visas. Indian IT firms, including Infosys and Tata Consultancy Services (TCS),

also recorded substantial reductions. Not everyone wants to get rid of the visa system.

According to the American Enterprise Institute and the Partnership for a New American Economy, increasing the H-1B visa cap could generate 1.3 million new jobs. It would contribute approximately \$158 billion to the US GDP by 2045. H-1B visa holders often add to the workforce instead of taking jobs from US workers. Trump's recent statement about H-1B visas has given hope to many visa seekers, especially Indians. He stated that the US needs skilled and intelligent people and promised more job opportunities. It provides a positive outlook for H-1B visas. H-1B visa holders often complement, rather than compete with, US workers. Now many H-1B visa seekers are hopeful after Trump has sided with Musk. He claimed that there was a need for skilled and intelligent workers. His promise of unprecedented job opportunities offered a positive outlook for those seeking H-1B visas. The Indian government closely monitors any backlash against Indian H-1B visa holders in the US.

(The writer is a popular columnist; views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SUPERSTAR CULTURE HURTS TEAM INDIA

Madam — No kudos is enough for Harbhajan Singh for boldly opposing the 'superstar culture' revolving around the 'holy cows' of Indian cricket. Irfan Pathan has also done the same and also questioned the place of Virat Kohli in the team. Not only has Kohli aggregated merely 190 runs in his nine innings in the just-concluded Indo-Australia Test series, but he has averaged less than 30 over the last five years! Yet Kohli gets not only allowed to dominate in the team; a deluge of silly excuses gets bizarrely served on the lines of 'Form Temporary Class Permanent', 'A century just an innings away', and "Stop criticising; runs will come!" And to render a damn lie to 'ultimate truth' through constant repetition, some former stars have started shouting, "Kohli has still 4-5 years of glorious cricket in him!" But if one is not a 'superstar', we get Wriddhiman Saha! So even after saving India from an imminent defeat in the Kanpur Test against New Zealand, that too by overcoming the unbearable pain of a stiff neck, Saha (then reigning as the world's best wicketkeeper) was clearly conveyed publicly, even when the Test was still on, that he is not in the team's 'scheme of things!' So in this biased, prejudiced setup, it is highly natural that this 'gallant show' of failures is sure to go on unless the 'superstar' culture is made to see its immediate end!

Kajal Chatterjee | Kolkata

JUSTIN TRUDEAU QUITS

Madam — The editorial 'Trudeau steps down' (Jan 8) highlights the domestic political reasons, economic failure and discontent in his own Liberal party for his resignation. In fact, Justin Trudeau scripted his own exit. His diplomatic blunders are also potential reasons for his resignation. He unnecessarily antagonised India for gaining Sikh support in elections without realising that the Khalistani movement is a secessionist and a hostile agitation that has the least support in India. He admitted had no proof of the involvement of

Cashless treatment for road accident victims



As per the report titled "National Strategy for Prevention of Unintentional Injury," there were 430,504 deaths from unintentional injuries in India. Despite efforts to improve road safety, India continues to grapple with a high number of fatalities due to road traffic injuries. It is unfortunate. The government of India, in line with its commitment to reduce fatalities, launched a pilot programme in Chandigarh in March 2024 to provide cashless treatment to the victims of road accidents caused by the use of motor vehi-

cles. The aim of this scheme was to establish an ecosystem for providing timely medical care to the victims of road accidents, including during the golden hour.

As per the scheme, the victims will be entitled to cashless treatment up to a maximum of 1.5 lakh rupees per accident per person for a maximum of 7 days from the date of the accident. It is applicable to all road accidents caused by the use of a motor vehicle on any category of road. Claims raised by hospitals for providing treatment to be remembered from the Motor Vehicle Accident Fund. The pilot programme was later expanded to six states. The scheme is going to be implemented nationwide from March 2025, as announced by Nitin Gadkari, Central Minister for Road Transport. It is really a welcome move. Certainly, lives of more accident victims will be saved.

P Victor Selvaraj | Tirunelveli

Indian agencies, yet he continued to blame India for the Nijjar murder case and promote and protect the extremist Pannu. His open support for Khalistani extremist elements eroded his credibility worldwide, as the Indian diaspora, including Sikh brethren, are peacefully living on all the continents, and only a few in Canada support Khalistan.

Trudeau gambled in vain. India observed utmost diplomatic restraint against Trudeau's anti-India statements on Khalistani extremists. It is true that no extremist or terrorist group dares to surge without government support, as it needs media, judiciary, police, and diplomatic support and funding for its secessionist, hatred, divisive, and violent activities. Canada provided all these facilities to the Khalistani extremists. Now the Trudeau tenure is over, the Khalistani extremists may not have a favourable time in Canada, and all false allegations against India in the Nizzar murder case will meet a logical end, and hardcore elements like Pannu will not be supported by the state. The Trudeau exit should be a lesson to

those foreign leaders who are inciting and supporting anti-national organisations in India.

Vinod Johri | Delhi

SALARY INCREMENTS DELAYED

Madam — Economic instability and the tendency of customers to reduce expenses have compelled major IT companies to postpone salary increments. This step by reputed firms like Infosys and LTI Mindtree is an effort to maintain financial balance, but its long-term impact could be severe.

A blow to employees' morale may lead to a decline in their creativity and efficiency. Additionally, measures like layoffs and reduction in workdays could create insecurity among the workforce. It is essential for companies to take balanced decisions that ensure financial stability while considering the human aspect, paving the way for holistic growth.

R K Jain | Barwani

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

STOP BLAMING, START AIMING

Blame is an easy escape when life doesn't go as planned, but it's also a barrier to personal growth



RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

Every man is the architect of his own life; hence one can easily say that we all try to make our lives just the way we want them to be, however, when something goes wrong, we immediately start looking out for someone or something to blame instead of changing ourselves to better the situation. It's a fact that we all spend too much of our time and energy in finding people to blame for all the problems in our life. But why do we need to blame someone? Because we want to redeem ourselves of the guilt of doing something wrong by justifying it, therefore internally we pass on the responsibility of our behaviour to a person, situation or an external factor. Doesn't that sound very normal? Well!!! It may be to the majority of us, but while playing this game of blaming, we forget that as per the Law of Karma, the one who changes himself first is the one who gets the gift of happiness. Hence if we are seekers of peace and happiness, then we have to change ourselves and not wait for others to do so. Blaming others happens due to a lack of vision to recognise and accept our faults and laziness in making amendments.



Gradually it becomes a habit of lethargy in a royal disguise. Usually, we blame others for our misery because we feel that things could have been better if the other person behaved properly with us, but we fail to understand the very fact that every action has an opposite and equal reaction, hence instead of looking at self, we always struggle to set the opposite person right.

When we are unable to find someone to blame, we end up blaming the situation. However, while doing so, we forget the fact that all the situations in our life are our creations, hence according to Karma Philosophy whatever we are experiencing currently is the result of an action, word or thought manifested sometime earlier. And now when it is time for us to repay, we should readily do it with courage & settle our karmic account to experience a burden-free state of mind. Right?

When the above two factors i.e. blaming someone or something don't work, the despaired human soul goes to the extent of blaming the Almighty because he feels that since everything in the world happens by the will of the Supreme, his plight is also an outcome of God's desire. Quite funny, isn't it? But we all indulge in such pastime activity daily. Remember! We all are actors who fall under the law of karma & perform actions to derive fruit out of it. Almighty never gets a share out of it.

As our teacher & guide, HE can teach, and make us understand, but HE cannot appear in the exam for us. Hence, we have to take all the tests of life by ourselves with full confidence. For a spiritual aspirant, unpleasant situations are examinations of life that are necessary to elevate one's spiritual stage & help in leaping forward in self-progress. Hence, we must not miss the opportunity to snap the web that we have all created with rationalization. Whether we fail or pass in these examinations doesn't matter much, what counts is the courage & vigour with which we face these examinations. For spiritual evolution, the habit of blaming is one of the major obstacles simply because the first rule of spirituality is observing one's self and not the others.

Hence it is very important to take responsibility for the experiences we undergo & make a conscious effort to do the right and be honest and accountable to ourselves because deceiving ourselves will only take us further away from spiritual liberation. So!! Stop blaming and start aiming because when you blame others, you give up your power to change.

(Writer is a spiritual educator & popular columnist; views are personal)

India's forests: Gains, gaps and the way forward



B K SINGH

The report underscores the need for robust monitoring, effective execution of plantation drives and third-party certification of carbon stock to meet India's climate commitments



Forest Survey of India has been releasing biannual reports on the status of Indian forests. The last report was released on December 31, 2021, and the current report which was due in December 2023, has been released after a year's delay. The highlight of the report is that total forest cover has been increased from 7,15,187 square km (2021 assessment) to 7,15,343 square km (current assessment), which is now 21.76 per cent of the total geographical area of the country. Also, the tree cover, which comprises trees along the linear infrastructures and also in agricultural fields up to one hectare is increased by 1289 square km, which is 3.41 per cent of the total geographical area of the country. The net increase of forest cover and tree cover is 1445 square km in two years period till 2023.

The increase in forest cover is a meager 156 square km. Among the states that have gained maximum increase in forest cover are Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Odisha. A maximum decrease in forest cover has been noticed in Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Ladakh and Nagaland. Recorded Forest / Green Wash areas (RFA/GW) are the forests in control of the forest department. While Mizoram, Odisha, Karnataka, West Bengal and Jharkhand have added in RFA/GW areas and the forest cover has increased, Tripura, Telangana, Assam, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat have lost. It indicates that states are losing their recorded forests. Villages on the fringes of the forests have been burning tree growth and occupying forest land with the support of local leaders and to claim it under the Forest Rights Act, of 2006. Improper implementation of the Forest Rights Act, of 2006 can be attributed to the reason for the loss of forests for agriculture. All the states have been taking up ambitious plantation programmes to increase forest cover and tree cover. The degraded forest areas are being planted regularly.

Taking a conservative estimate, a minimum of 18,000 square km area is being planted annually in the country; should



THE NET INCREASE OF FOREST COVER AND TREE COVER IS 1445 SQUARE KM IN TWO YEARS PERIOD TILL 2023. THE INCREASE IN FOREST COVER IS A MEAGER 156 SQUARE KM. AMONG THE STATES THAT HAVE GAINED MAXIMUM INCREASE IN FOREST COVER ARE UTTAR PRADESH, RAJASTHAN, CHHATTISGARH AND ODISHA

it not be reflected in this report? How can we justify a 7 square km increase in RFA? It only indicates that deforestation and degradation are taking place at the same pace, we are planting the areas. Such an important report should contain an assessment of the success of plantations across the states. Forest cover outside RFA has increased in Gujarat, Bihar, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh and Assam, while it has been lost in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Arunachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. Loss of cover outside RFA is on account of the failure of the administration of the Revenue department of the state. States should put greater vigil on such forests.

These are the carbon sinks and in the era of a warming world, we cannot afford to plunder tree growth even outside RFA. The bright spot in the report is the success of the agroforestry programme. Most states have lost forest cover, but have gained in tree cover. This means that tree planting programmes on private lands/community lands have been largely successful. Trees on government lands can be cut and destroyed, but the same cannot be done on private lands. In this period of two years, very dense forests increased by 3465.12 square km, while moderately dense forests and open forests have decreased by 1043.23 square km and 2480.11 square km respectively. Forest departments' efforts in taking up plantations in open and degraded areas appear to have shown some success. A large chunk of open and degraded areas has been re-stocked, which has pushed it into the very dense forest category.

But a simple arithmetic indicates that 58 square km of forests have been lost. Most probably, several small plots taken from forests on the fringes of the villages must

have been encroached on for agriculture and eventually community members had an intention to claim rights over it. Decadal changes in forest cover in Western Ghats eco-sensitive areas have also been brought out in the report. It is found that 58.22 square km of cover is lost in ten years. How can we forget the 30th July tragedy that struck Wayanad, Kerala? Nearly 500 humans were buried under landslide debris when they were asleep.

It also damaged roads, bridges, buildings and human houses. Landslides in portions of Karnataka and Maharashtra across the Western Ghats have disrupted lives and livelihoods. Losing 58 square km in ten years means losing nearly 6 square km annually. We need to mend our ways and cannot afford to lose any tree growth in such eco-sensitive areas. Mangroves in the country along the coastline protect against tsunamis, cyclones and Sea surges of any kind. The report indicates that out of 4991 square km of mangroves 7.5 square km is lost in two years. While Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra together have added 25 square km of mangroves, Gujarat has lost 36 square km. On the western coast Gujarat is the most vulnerable state against frequent and destructive cyclones, how can it afford to lose such a big chunk of mangrove forests?

Other coastal states are reportedly expanding their mangroves by taking up large-scale planting, but the report does not show any increase. There has to be an enquiry as to why mangrove plantation programs are failing. Another highlight of the report is that the growing stock of carbon in the forests is 7285 Mt, and comparing it with the 2021 report there is an increase of 81.5 Mt in two years. Thus our forests are adding 40.75 Mt of carbon annually,

which is like 149 Mt of CO2 equivalent annually. Comparing it with the report of 2005, the growth in forests has created a carbon sink of 2.29 billion tons of CO2 equivalent compared to the 2005 level. To contain the average global rise in temperature within 1.50 Celsius, we have committed in our nationally determined contribution to achieve a carbon sink of 2.5 to 3.0 billion tons of CO2 equivalent by 2030 in response to the Paris Climate Accord of 2015. We are on course to achieve the target well before 2030. I suppose we need a third-party assessment for carbon stock in our forests. Carbon credit has been quite a contentious issue and in several annual climate conferences, UNFCCC has failed to find a resolution. However, for the first time at Baku CoP 29, a resolution has been achieved. It has allowed countries to trade carbon credits - certified reductions of carbon emissions at prices determined as a consequence of emission caps imposed.

It has also been agreed that the operations of the carbon market would be supervised by the UN body. Strict UN control is needed, as a project proponent in the developed nation can pay for an afforestation project to absorb 1000 tons of CO2 in a developing nation where trees fail to put in desired growth and are unable to sequester the entire quantity of carbon credited. Therefore, the carbon sink created by us through our interventions in forest growth needs certification from the UN body. The report in future should take into account the plantation programs each state is implementing and measure the change in the cover concerning the success/ failure of plantations.

(The writer is retired Principal chief conservator of forests, head of Forest Force, Karnataka. Views expressed are personal)

Mahakumbh 2025: A spiritual confluence of faith, wisdom and Sahaj Smriti Yog

The Mahakumbh invites millions to experience a celestial confluence of rivers, spirituality and wisdom

The Mahakumbh at Prayagraj, commencing on January 13, 2025, promises a celestial confluence of rivers, minds, and spirituality. This ancient gathering is a tribute to India's cultural and spiritual heritage, drawing millions of pilgrims and seekers worldwide. This year, the Mahakumbh assumes greater significance as it hosts a 'Samagam' (gathering) of seers and spiritual leaders to discuss Guru Nand Kishore's book, Sahaj Smriti Yog (An Impactful Form of Yoga and Meditation) and his teachings on Sanatan Dharma, spirituality and meditation.



B K JHA

Sahaj Smriti Yog, founded by Guru Nand Kishore of the Darpan Foundation, transcends being a meditation technique; it is a journey to

self-realisation. It guides individuals to transition from clear thinking to transcending thought, unveiling inner peace and clarity. Gururji emphasises that rediscovering one's true self involves uncovering innate purity and harmony. In Sahaj Smriti Yog, Gururji delves into the alignment of

this practice with the eternal principles of Sanatan Dharma, which sees truth as timeless and unchanging. The Mahakumbh's spiritual energy provides an ideal setting for this exploration. Guru Nand Kishore's interpretation of Sanatan Dharma underscores timeless wisdom, essential for spiritual pursuits. He highlights Guru Parampara (the lineage of spiritual masters) as vital for spiritual evolution, stating, "Sanatan Dharma offers solutions before problems arise—a clarity achievable through meditation or Samadhi." This wisdom, he explains, allowed ancient seers to provide fearless counsel to rulers. Central to Sahaj Smriti Yog is the Guru's role as a mirror reflecting the seeker's inner

self. Guru Nand Kishore asserts that true Gurus cannot self-proclaim; they are identified by seekers who trust their guidance.

He warns against false spiritual leaders, emphasising that genuine Guru help dissolve ego, a prerequisite for enlightenment. Trust, he stresses, forms the foundation of the Guru-disciple relationship—a value modern society must urgently rediscover. The philosophy of Sahaj Smriti Yog is rooted in simplicity and universality, making it accessible to all. Unlike practices advocating detachment, it encourages embracing life's responsibilities fully. Transformation arises not by escaping reality but by engaging with it deeply and meaningfully. This approach fosters



spiritual growth while remaining grounded in daily life. The practice is built on three principles: understanding, experiencing, and feeling. Understanding cultivates self-awareness through intelligence and emotions. Experiencing transforms life's events into opportunities for growth. Feeling connects prac-

tioners with ultimate reality, transcending superficial existence to access profound essence.

What sets Sahaj Smriti Yog apart is its non-coercive nature. It doesn't demand rigorous discipline or thought suppression but gently guides the mind to a state of deep peace and harmony. Practitioners effortlessly rediscover inner stillness and clarity.

Guru Nand Kishore's vision extends to societal harmony. The Darpan Foundation and its ashram in Noorundumalai, Tamil Nadu, embody this philosophy. The ashram is a sanctuary for exploring Sahaj Smriti Yog principles, emphasising sustainability and holistic living. Gururji advocates conscious choices, such as

supporting locally grown food, to nourish both individuals and the planet.

The Mahakumbh provides an unparalleled platform for spiritual exchange. The 'Samagam' on Sahaj Smriti Yog will explore trust, humility, and spiritual growth. Guru Nand Kishore's teachings offer a roadmap for resolving global conflicts by fostering trust and reducing ego-driven blindness. He believes peace begins with personal transformation, replacing arrogance with clarity and humility.

As humanity faces division and mistrust, Gururji's Sahaj Smriti Yog serves as a beacon of hope, offering paths to personal enlightenment and collective harmony. The Mahakumbh amplifies this

message, inviting individuals from all walks of life on a transformative journey.

Through the lens of Sahaj Smriti Yog, the Mahakumbh celebrates eternal spirituality, where ancient wisdom meets contemporary relevance. It calls humanity to embrace simplicity, sustainability, and spiritual clarity. As millions gather at Prayagraj to witness the confluence of rivers, Sahaj Smriti Yog reminds us that true peace begins within. Gururji's words, "Clarity gives you power," encapsulate the transformative potential of this timeless practice. Let Mahakumbh 2025 be a milestone in redefining spirituality for a harmonious world.

(The writer is a senior journalist. Views expressed are personal)

Saranggi Mahajan alleges Munde cousins in land grab

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI:

Amid vehement clamour for his resignation over an extortion-linked murder of a sarpanch in his home district of Beed, Maharashtra Minister Dhananjay Munde found himself trouble on Wednesday, as late senior BJP leader Pramod Mahajan's sister-in-law Saranggi Mahajan accused him and his cousin minister Pankaja Munde of having "grabbed" her late husband's land. Saranggi, wife of Pravin Mahajan who shot dead his elder brother and former Union Minister Pramod Mahajan at the latter's home in April 2006, has knocked Maharashtra chief minister Devendra Fadnavis's door, demanding justice for her. While Dhananjay belongs to the NCP (Ajit Pawar), Pankaja - daughter of late BJP

leader Gopinath Munde -- is from the ruling BJP. Both are ministers in the Devendra Fadnavis-led MahaYuti government. Mahajans and Munde are related, because Gopinath Munde had married Pramod's sister Pradnya. Saranggi, whose husband Pravin died of multi-organ failure within four years after he killed his own brother and influential politician Pramod, has opened a Pandora box, by dragging two ministers in a fresh controversy at a time when Dhananjay Munde is having a tough time of alleged involvement in the Rs two crore extortion case linked to Sarpanch's murder. Saranggi has alleged that Walmik Karad, the key accused in the Rs 2 crore extortion case who is close to both Dhananjay and Pankaja, had threatened her with dire

consequences and got a piece of her family land worth Rs 3.5 crore transferred in the name of Dhananjay Munde's employee Govind Munde for a mere Rs 21 lakh in Parli taluka of Beed district. After the land transfer, 7X12 extracts of the land were changed. "People who threatened me were the accomplices of Walmik Karad. I met Dhananjay Munde and told him how her land came to be transferred in the name of his employee. He did not help in any way. In this land grab, both Dhananjay and Pankaja are involved," Saranggi alleged. Having already taken up the matter with the NCP (SP) president Sharad Pawar, Saranggi is hoping that chief minister Fadnavis will help in getting land back. Saranggi's charge against the Munde cousins comes less

than a week after Dhananjay refused to resign from his post as the Maharashtra Minister. The development came after Walmiki Karad surrendered to the police in the Sarpanch murder-linked extortion case. Sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh (45) was allegedly killed for attempting to thwart the extortion bid on the windmill company. He was first abducted, brutally tortured and later killed in broad daylight near the windmill company office on the afternoon of December 9, 2024. While refusing to resign from his ministerial post, Dhananjay Munde wondered: "Why should I resign? I am in no way directly or indirectly involved (in the murder or extortion cases)...the police is probing the matter."

High-speed trial successful on Katra-Banihal rail link

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Led by a Commissioner of Railways Safety, a highly spirited team of Indian Railways Wednesday 'crossed the last mile' atop the world's highest 'Chenab railway bridge' and the Anji Khad cable-stayed rail bridge during a high-speed trial on the Katra-Banihal section at a speed of 110 km/h. The Indian Railways conducted the statutory high-speed trial run along the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link (USBRL) project before launching the much-awaited train services connecting Kashmir Valley with the rest of the country. The Government of India is expected to take a final call on the launch of the services on receipt of the final inspection report of the Commissioner of Railways Safety.

Interacting with the media after completing the first leg of the high-speed trial run at Banihal railway station, Commissioner of Railways Safety Dinesh Chand Deshwal said the inspection and the trial run on the trek had been satisfactory so far. "The trial run at 110 kilometers per hour on the 180-degree rising grade in such a challenging geography from Katra to Banihal has written a new chapter in the history of the Railways. The trial run was smooth and filled us with a sense of fulfillment and the credit for it goes to our engineers who have done such great work." Deshwal said his team would return to Katra and all the collected data would be analyzed before a decision was taken on the start of direct train services to Kashmir.

Delhi varsity professor resigns after sexual harassment allegations

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A professor at Delhi University's Ramjas College, who had been accused of sexual harassment, resigned on Wednesday following protests by students on campus over the alleged inaction by the administration on the issue. The alleged incident reportedly took place in December last year, when the professor, who also holds a prominent position in the university's student welfare cell, sexually harassed a minor female student. Students from various groups, including left-leaning organizations such as the All India Students Association (AISA) and the Students Federation of India (SFI), as well as the RSS-affiliated Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), held demonstrations on Wednesday demanding the professor's suspension. The protest turned violent when some unidentified individuals wielding sticks attacked students on campus, as seen in videos circulating on social media. While AISA and SFI alleged that the attackers were ABVP members, ABVP denied the allegations, claiming they were peacefully protesting. Earlier, the college principal, Ajay Arora, stated that an inquiry was ongoing against the professor and assured that action would be taken against those involved in the violence. "The matter is being investigated by the college's Internal Complaints Committee (ICC). The administration cannot act under pressure from students," Arora said.

"Those responsible for the violence will be identified, and appropriate action will be taken," he added. In a statement, AISA accused ABVP members of attacking students and a faculty member from the English Department during the protest. AISA also alleged that the accused professor was a repeat offender, citing a 2021 complaint that raised similar concerns against him. The group criticised the ICC for not taking timely action on the current complaint, which was filed over 10 days ago. "AISA resolves to fight tooth and nail against such attacks on gender justice. We demand the immediate suspension of the professor and the reconstitution of the ICC to ensure fairness," their statement read. The SFI also condemned the violence, accusing ABVP of attacking students and obstructing their protest. According to SFI, Stanzin, Vice President of the Ramjas College Students' Union, was among those injured. "Despite administrative failures and ABVP's violent tactics, we will not rest until our demands for justice are met," said Neha, Secretary of SFI Ramjas. In its statement, the ABVP denied any involvement in the violence and claimed that the professor's resignation came after a six-hour-long protest by them. ABVP stated that it was the first to demand strict action against the professor, including filing a police complaint. The student organization also said its members locked the professor's office to highlight their demands.

IAF Chief: every citizen is a soldier, not just in uniform

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

IAF Chief Air Chief Marshal A P Singh on Wednesday said that every citizen of India is akin to a soldier and that while serving the country in uniform has a different charm, one can also serve the nation even without donning military colours. In his address at the ongoing Republic Day National Cadet

Corps (NCC) Camp at Delhi Cantonment, he underlined the ethos of the NCC, noting that this is the place where people from different backgrounds "become one," embodying the essence of India. He said that the young minds of India, trained at the NCC and the Republic Day camp, are being prepared for nation-building, as they are the future

of India who will later take up various professions. "I have heard many cadets express a desire to join the armed forces -- the Army, Navy, and Air Force. It's wonderful that you want to, as serving the nation in uniform has a distinct charm. But to serve the nation, one may not necessarily need to wear a uniform. This is something we must remember," the IAF chief

said. He further said that service to the nation is not confined to those in uniform, nor is patriotism limited to them, rather "it resides in everyone, every citizen of this country," he added. He recounted a visit to a camp to emphasise his point. "Somebody there said -- 'Every soldier is a citizen in uniform, and every citizen is a soldier

out of uniform'. I think that is the way... Each and every citizen of this country is a soldier, and should look after the country, to ensure its safety and security..." the air chief marshal said. "So whether we wear a uniform or not, we can serve the nation. The values learned here will guide you throughout your life, no matter which career path you choose," he said.

He illustrated his point of becoming a good citizen by displaying discipline akin to a soldier, in public or private life. For instance, he encouraged respecting traffic laws, whether or not a police officer is present to enforce them, or whether a penalty is in place. Earlier on his arrival, the air chief marshal was welcomed by NCC cadets and a school band treated him to a performance.

DU's LSR, 14 others get bomb hoax threat calls

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According to senior officials, the Delhi Police have written to service providers like Google, VK (known as Mail.Ru), and Outlook.Com to obtain the IP addresses of the senders. "Our investigation is underway. We are working to trace the origin of the sender. While their servers or domains have been traced to European or Middle Eastern countries, the actual origin remains unconfirmed, as the emails were sent using VPNs (Virtual Private Networks) or proxy servers," an officer said, adding that a dedicated unit of the Delhi Police Special Cell has been tasked with investigating the threat cases.

2025 begins with multiple tiger deaths across India

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

It seems, the year 2025 has not begun on a happy note for wildlife lovers and conservationists. In just six days of this year, while three tigers and one leopard at a Nagpur rescue centre in Maharashtra succumbed to avian influenza, the same number of striped predators were found dead in the wild in separate incidents, albeit due to different reasons like electrocution and suspected poaching. According to the data available from the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) website, two wild big cats died in Maharashtra and one in Madhya Pradesh's

Pench Tiger Reserve. Two deaths were outside the protected areas (PAs). The first death of the year from the wild was reported when a male adult tiger was found dead in Maharashtra's Bramhapuri Forest Division. Another mortality was reported on January 5th when a tigress body was found by the wildlife department in Seoni division in Pench Tiger Reserve. The following day i.e. on January 6, yet another tigress was discovered dead with burn marks noticed on the body, suggesting attempted burning. Officials suspect electrocution, leading to one person's detention for questioning. This marks the

second tiger death recently in Tumsar, with investigations ongoing. However, in encouraging news, last year witnessed a significant drop in tiger fatalities nationwide, underscoring the effectiveness of ongoing conservation efforts for these majestic animals. Overall, 127 tigers died in the wild in 2024 which was less when compared to previous year when 182 mortalities were reported. In Maharashtra 22 tigers died in 2024, which was less than half as compared to 2023. The last tiger death was reported on December 30 from a village in Devanara Village in Maharashtra.

Fraud accused dies in fall

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

To escape from police custody, a cyber fraud accused jumped from the third-floor balcony of the hotel and died after he hit the balcony of the opposite house, police said. It is being said that during the investigation of a cyber fraud case, Madhya Pradesh Police had arrested four accused from a society in Dhunela village of Sohna on Tuesday. According to the police, the Gwalior ATS team was staying on the third floor of the Saffron Oyo Hotel in front of Sohna's general bus stand with four accused who were arrested in the cybercrime case. "At around 1 pm on Tuesday, an accused Himanshu, a resident of Sukhshin village in Madhepura district of Bihar, asked to go to the toilet but he did not go to the bathroom

and went towards the balcony next to it. To escape from police custody, he jumped down using the wire attached to the pole in front of the balcony. But while jumping, he could not hold the wire and fell. His head hit the ground while being dragged along the pole. He suffered serious injuries," a police officer privy to the matter said. The police team took him to Sohna Hospital, where he was declared dead on arrival. It is said that the Madhya Pradesh Police did not inform the Gurugram Police about this action. "The body was sent for postmortem and the family were informed. The postmortem will be conducted by the board in Gurugram on Wednesday," Sandeep Kumar, a spokesperson of the Gurugram police said.

Cong claims 16 Lakh fake voters added in Delhi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Wednesday alleged that the Election Commission seems to have enrolled 16 lakh more electors than the entire adult population in Maharashtra as estimated by the Narendra Modi government. Chairman of the Congress' Data Analytics department, Pravin Chakravarty, claimed there was a sudden increase of 50 lakh voters in just four months of the Maharashtra assembly elections, which is 16 lakh more than the entire adult

population in the state. "It is in the interest of the nation's democracy and strengthening voters trust that the CEC (chief election commissioner), rather than grandstanding and hiding behind flowery poetry, should acknowledge the uncomfortable truth and take remedial actions and steps as a dutiful public servant," Chakravarty said in a statement. He cited the November 2019 report of the National Commission on Population of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

No panic over HMPV, but vigilance increased

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In fact, hospitals across Gujarat have established dedicated isolation wards. Civil hospitals in key cities, including Gandhinagar, Ahmedabad, and Rajkot, have taken these precautionary steps to enhance preparedness and prevent the potential spread of the virus. To further enhance preparedness, the administration has been holding regular meetings to review the situation and ensure adequate facilities are in place. First identified in 2001 but known to circulate since the 1970s, human metapneumovirus is a

common respiratory virus that causes mild cold-like symptoms. Manipur too is on its toe even though no case has been reported from the State so far. The State authorities have been conducting mock drills at various hospitals across Manipur to assess their preparedness to combat an outbreak of human metapneumovirus (HMPV), if any. "All district surveillance units are on alert for any unusual clustering of ILI/ SARI cases," a statement from the State Health Department said. It said the suspected cases must be reported to the district health authorities for necessary action. On the

other hand, the Mizoram government has established a dedicated committee to closely monitor the situation. The decision followed a meeting led by Health Minister Lalrinpuui on Monday. Haryana Government said that an advisory has been issued to civil surgeons across the region, urging vigilance and prepare to handle any potential cases to ensure public health safety. At the same time, Himachal Pradesh Health Minister Dhani Ram Shandil cleared that no uncommon spike has been registered anywhere across the country in the cases related to influenza disease and other serious breathing-

related diseases. To ensure that the State is not caught unaware in case of the outbreak of the pathogen, Jharkhand Health Minister Dr Irfan Ansari has instructed the Health Department to remain vigilant in preventing the spread of HMPV across the state. He has also asked officials to deploy medical teams at railway stations and airports across the state for heightened monitoring. As per a 2021 study published in The Lancet Global Health around 14.2 million cases of HMPV-associated acute lower respiratory infections (ALRIs) in children under five globally in 2018. The study found that infants under one year are

particularly vulnerable to severe HMPV infections, comparable to the risks posed by respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and influenza. It also revealed that infants younger than six months in low- and lower-middle-income countries face the highest mortality risk from HMPV-related ALRIs. Common symptoms of HMPV infection include cough, cold, fever, etc. In some cases, infection may also lead to breathlessness, and nasal congestion. According to health experts, even though there is no vaccine for HMPV, a regular flu shot or three doses of Covid vaccine makes one immune against it.

One Election, complex views

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A TMC MP said upholding people's democratic rights is more important than saving money. Some opposition MPs demanded that the Joint Committee of Parliament, headed by former Union minister P P Chaudhary, scrutinising the two bills should be given a tenure of at least one year due to the enormity of the exercise. V Vijayasar Reddy of the YSR Congress, which had earlier supported the concept in its submission to the Kovind committee, raised a number of questions over the bills, and demanded that ballot papers must replace Electronic

Voting Machines which are is "vulnerable to manipulation". Reddy claimed that simultaneous elections will dilute diversity of representations and local issues, undermine the need for elected representatives to engage regularly with voters and turn polls into a contest between two or three national parties. JD(U) MP Sanjay Jha, sources said, spoke of the incidents of booth capturing in Bihar during the use of ballot papers to refute the suggestion to bring them back. The BJP ally, however, also raised a few questions, including whether a government elected for a

short tenure will have the required governance focus that an incumbent with five-year term will have. The bills propose that if a mid-term Lok Sabha or assembly election is held due to the fall of a government and the absence of any alternative, the tenure of the new legislature will be for the remainder of outgoing House. The Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill and the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill were introduced in the Lok Sabha during the recent Winter Session and referred to the committee. The panel has 27 members from the Lok Sabha, and 12 from the Rajya Sabha.

INDIA BLOC FALLS IN DELHI

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Talking to reporters in Lucknow, Yadav made it clear that SP will support AAP in Delhi and he would share the stage with them. Yadav further stated that he would not support Congress. Besides, the Shiv Sena (UBT) is planning to campaign in support of Arvind Kejriwal and AAP in the next few days. Kejriwal is in touch with Uddhav Thackeray. The 70-member assembly of the national capital will go to polls on February 5 and the counting of votes will take place on February 8. Kejriwal's AAP is seeking a third term in office in the capital, going in for a head-on

fight with the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Congress. It dominated the 2020 assembly elections by winning 62 out of 70 seats while the BJP got only eight seats. Both the AAP and the Congress have been locked in an intense battle, over various issues, for quite some time. Last month, Delhi Congress leader Ajay Maken's remarks that a tie-up with the AAP during the Lok Sabha polls was a "mistake" further worsened relations between the allies. The AAP said it will ask other members of the INDIA bloc to remove the Congress from the alliance, if the latter does not act against Maken for his remarks.

AAP, BJP workers crossfire over PM home, CM's mahal

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The police cited lack of permission to allow entry, and Bharadwaj countered as to why a Minister and MP needed permission to enter the Chief Minister's residence. "I'm an MP, he is a minister, and you're stopping us? Under which law are you stopping us?" Singh is heard telling the police personnel. Singh and Bharadwaj were seen requesting officials to allow them inside. "Who has instructed you to stop us? I am a minister and I am here for an inspection. How can you stop me and on whose orders? Have you received directions from the Lieutenant Governor? He is the only authority above my position," Bharadwaj was heard telling an official whose directions they were being stopped on. A PWD official also reached the spot and

requested Singh and Bharadwaj not to enter the premises. They then moved to the PM's house, and when stopped, staged a sit-in near the Tughlak Road Police Station. After being denied entry at Lok Kalyan Marg, Bharadwaj said, "We came here to conclude this argument of 'tera ghar, mera ghar'. We said that the PM residence and CM residence should both be shown to the people. So, we came here." The party leaders accused the BJP-led central government of running away from the challenged inspection of the PM residence, which they alleged had been renovated at an inordinate cost. "BJP's lie has been exposed before the entire nation today. They claimed that there is a mini bar, a swimming pool, and a commode made of gold at the former Chief Minister's residence. However, they did

not allow us to enter and show the truth to the public. "Now, they are also preventing us from revealing the reality of the Prime Minister's residence, which has been built at a cost of 2,700 crore," Sanjay Singh said at the protest near the PM's residence. Asked if they had sought permission to visit the residence, Singh told reporters earlier, "Why should we need permission to enter the chief minister's residence?" Addressing a press briefing earlier, Bharadwaj said, "As promised, we will visit the chief minister's official residence at 6, Flagstaff Road, at 11 am and try to find the golden commode, swimming pool, and mini bar that the BJP claims are present there." He added, "It should be noted that both these properties are government residences. They were built with taxpayers' money and came up during the

Covid pandemic. If there are allegations of misappropriation of funds, both should be investigated." In response, Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva reached AB 17 Mathura Road bungalow allotted to Delhi Chief Minister Atishi. He accused the AAP of staging a drama at the former CM's bungalow while the model code of conduct was in force ahead of the Assembly polls. "Why did AAP leaders Sanjay Singh and Saurabh Bharadwaj not visit the Sheesh Mahal earlier?" Sachdeva said. The "Raj Mahal" jibe is part of AAP's counter allegation that the prime minister leads a luxurious lifestyle. At a press conference, Trivedi slammed the AAP leaders saying that both Sanjay Singh and Saurabh Bharadwaj trying to "forcibly" enter the premises was an example of

"irresponsible, insane and anarchic behaviour". "Their conduct was also an example of 'political etiquette and ethics' being demolished, Trivedi said. Kejriwal's 'Sheesh Mahal' has become a 'monument of his extravagance' and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) cannot hide from this truth. "What AAP leaders did today was a glaring example of their irresponsible, insane and anarchic behaviour". They tried to enter the (former CM's residence) forcibly," Trivedi told a press conference at the BJP headquarters here. "No matter how much they try, they cannot get away with the 'Sheesh Mahal', which has become a monument of Kejriwal's extravagance. They cannot get away with the truth that a museum of a variety of luxury items was set up in the 'Sheesh Mahal' with the money looted from the people of

Delhi," he said. Kejriwal vacated the 6, Flagstaff Road, bungalow last October. It has since been at the centre of a controversy over alleged costly fittings and other items. The BJP has made the "Sheesh Mahal" allegation a large part of its election campaign. Sachdeva has claimed that valuable items, including a "golden commode," were missing after the bungalow was vacated by Kejriwal. A slugfest between AAP and BJP has broken out, and allegations and counter-allegations have intensified as the polling date for Delhi Assembly election approaches. BJP has leveled allegations of irregularities in the renovation of Delhi CM's residence. Dubbing the CM bungalow as "Sheesh Mahal," the BJP has made the issue its key poll plank in the run-up to elections.

'All hell will break out if hostages in Gaza are not freed': Trump warns Hamas

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

US President-elect Donald Trump has warned that "all hell will break out in the Middle East" if the hostages being held by Hamas are not released by Inauguration Day. Trump did not elaborate on what actions he might take if the captives are not released by the time he takes office. Officials say about 100 hostages, including some Americans, who were seized on October 7, 2023, remain captive in Gaza, though they believe many of them may have died in captivity. "All hell will break out. If those hostages aren't back, I don't want to hurt your negotiation, if they're not back by the time I get into office, all hell will break out in the Middle East," Trump told reporters at a news conference in Mar-a-Lago, Florida.

Trump will be sworn in on January 20 as the 47th President of the United States. He was responding to a question on the status of negotiations with Hamas on the release of American hostages. His Special Envoy to the Middle East Steven Charles Witkoff, who has just returned from the region, told reporters that they are on the verge of it. "I believe we've been on the verge of it. I don't want to discuss sort of what's delayed it, no point in being negative in any way. But I think it's the president, his stature, what he's said he expects, the red lines he's put out there, that's driving this negotiation," Witkoff said. Noting that they are making a lot of progress, he said: "I don't want to say too much because I think they're doing a really good job back in Doha. I'm leaving tomorrow to go back to Doha. But I think that we've had

some really great progress and I'm really hopeful that by the inauguration we'll have some good things to announce on behalf of the president." Negotiations between Hamas and Israel are ongoing in Qatar, with Hamas this week naming 34 hostages in Gaza — including two dual US citizens — it would be willing to release in a ceasefire deal, the National Public Radio reported. Trump, in response to a question, warned Hamas to release all the hostages by January 20. "It will not be good for Hamas and it will not be good frankly for anyone. All hell will break out. I don't have to say anymore, but that's what it is. They should have given them back a long time ago — they should have never taken them. There should have never been the attack of October 7th. People forget that, but there was and many people were killed," he said.

Trump doesn't rule out using military to get Panama Canal, Greenland

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

US President-elect Donald Trump on Tuesday did not rule out the use of the military to bring Panama Canal and Greenland under American control, which he argued is of great economic and strategic significance to the United States. "I'm not going to commit to that. Now it might be that you'll have to do something," Trump told reporters at Mar-a-Lago in Florida. He was asked if he would use the military to gain control of both the Panama Canal and Greenland. "Look, the Panama Canal is vital to our country, it's being operated by China, China. And we gave the Panama Canal to Panama, we didn't give it to China," Trump said. Giving the Panama Canal to Panama in just one dollar by the former president Jimmy Carter, he argued, was a very big mistake. "Giving the Panama Canal to Panama was a very big mistake. We lost 38,000 people. It cost us the equivalent of USD 1 trillion, maybe more than that,

probably the most expensive structure, if we call it a structure, which I guess you can ever build. Giving that away was a horrible thing," he said. Trump said the US needs Greenland for national security purposes. "I've been told that for a long time, long before I even ran. I mean people have been talking about it for a long time. You have approximately 45,000 people there. People really don't even know if Denmark has any legal right to it, but if they do, they should give it up because we need it for national security," Trump asserted. "That's for the free world. I'm talking about protecting the free world. You don't even need binoculars, you look outside, you have China ships all over the place. You have Russian ships all over the place. We're not letting that happen. We're not letting it happen. If Denmark wants to get to a conclusion — but nobody knows if they even have any right title or interest," he said. "The people are going to probably vote for independence or to come into the United States.

But if they do that, then I would tariff Denmark at a very high level," he said. Trump said he has not drawn up a plan for acquisition of Greenland yet. Hawaii was the last territorial acquisition of the United States. It was admitted as the 50th State on August 21, 1959. Alaska, the largest US State, was admitted as the 49th State on January 3, 1959. On New Year's eve, Greenland's Prime Minister Mute Egede has expressed his desire to obtain independence from Denmark. "The Greenlandic people's opportunity for independence has been adopted through the provisions of the Self-Government Act, thereby creating a legal basis for how independence can be achieved," Egede said on the eve of the new year celebrations. "A draft constitution for our country has also been prepared. Work has already begun with regard to creating the framework for Greenland as an independent state within the possibilities and provisions of the Self-Government Act," he said.



The flag-draped casket of former President Jimmy Carter lies in state during a ceremony in the Capitol on Tuesday in Washington. Carter died on Dec. 29 at the age of 100.

AP/PTI

Jimmy Carter eulogised by Kamala Harris, congressional leaders

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Nearly 44 years after Jimmy Carter left the nation's capital in humbling defeat, the 39th president returned to Washington for three days of state funeral rites starting Tuesday. Carter's remains, which had been lying in repose at the Carter Presidential Centre since Saturday, left the Atlanta campus Tuesday morning, accompanied by his children and extended family. Special Air Mission 39 departed Dobbins Air Reserve Base north of Atlanta and arrived at Joint Base Andrews in Maryland. A motorcade carried the casket into Washington for a final journey to the Capitol, where members of Congress will pay their respects. In Georgia, eight military pallbearers held Carter's casket as cannons fired on the tarmac nearby. They carried it to a vehicle that lifted it to the passenger compartment of the aircraft, the iconic blue and white Boeing 747 variant that is known as Air Force One when the sitting president is on board. Carter never travelled as president on the jet, which first flew as Air Force One in 1990

with President George HW Bush. The scene repeated outside Washington. The former president's casket was removed from the plane, cannons fired and a military band played. A hearse emblazoned with the seal of the president joined a motorcade that steered toward Washington. A bipartisan delegation of members of Congress were led into the Capitol Rotunda by Sens. Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff, Democrats who represent Carter's home state. Vice President Kamala Harris, members of President Joe Biden's cabinet and three of the nine US Supreme Court justices — John Roberts, Brett Kavanaugh and Elena Kagan — also were present. The US Army Band Brass Quintet played as people awaited the casket. The room fell silent as three knocks on the rotunda door marked Carter's arrival. The casket was placed in the middle of the room on the Lincoln catafalque, a platform built in 1865 to hold slain president Abraham Lincoln's casket in the same place. Harris, Senate Majority Leader John Thune and House Speaker Mike Johnson deliv-

ered eulogies celebrating Carter's faith, military service and devotion to service, including his hands-on contributions to building homes for those in need through Habitat for Humanity. "Jimmy Carter was that all too rare example of a gifted man who also walks with humility, modesty and grace," Harris said, recalling his unpretentious approach to campaigning. He slept in the homes of his supporters to "share a meal with them at their table and listen to what was on their minds," she said. The US Naval Academy Glee Club performed the patriotic hymn "My Country, 'Tis of Thee" before bipartisan congressional leaders and Harris, accompanied by her husband Doug Emhoff, placed wreaths beside the casket. Members of Carter's family, including some of his grandchildren, wiped tears. Carter, who died December 29 at the age of 100, will lie in state Tuesday night and again Wednesday. He receives a state funeral Thursday at Washington National Cathedral. Biden will deliver a eulogy. There are the familiar rituals

that follow a president's death — the Air Force ride back to the Beltway, a military honor guard carrying a flag-draped casket up the Capitol steps, the Lincoln catafalque in the rotunda. There also will be symbolism unique to Carter. As he was carried from his presidential centre, a military band played hymns — "Amazing Grace" and "Blessed Assurance" for the outspoken Baptist evangelical who called himself a "born-again Christian" when he sought and won the presidency in 1976. In Washington, his hearse stopped at the US Navy Memorial, where his remains were transferred to a horse-drawn caisson for the rest of his trip to the Capitol. The location nods to Carter's place as the lone US Naval Academy graduate to become commander in chief. All of the pomp carries some irony for the Democrat who went from his family peanut warehouse to the Governor's Mansion and eventually the White House. Carter won the presidency as the smiling Southerner and technocratic engineer who promised to change the ways of Washington — and eschewed

many of those unwritten rules when he got there. From 1977 to 1981, Carter was Washington's highest-ranking resident. But he never mastered it. "He could be prickly and a not very appealing personality" in a town that thrives on relationship, said biographer Jonathan Alter, describing a president who struggled with schmoozing lawmakers and reporters. Carter often flouted the ceremonial trappings that have been on display in Georgia and will continue in Washington. As president, he wanted to keep the Marine Band from playing "Hail to the Chief," thinking it elevated the president too much. His advisers convinced him to accept it as part of the job. The song played Saturday as he arrived at his presidential center after a motorcade through his hometown of Plains and past his boyhood farm. It played again as his remains were carried out on their way to Washington. He also never used his full name, James Earl Carter Jr., even taking the oath of office. His full name was printed on memorial cards given to all mourners who paid their respects in Atlanta.

Tents arrive for survivors of quake that killed 126 in freezing Tibet

AP ■ BEIJING

Rescuers in the freezing, high-altitude Tibet region in western China searched a second day for any remaining victims of a deadly earthquake that struck near a holy city for Tibetan Buddhists, before shifting their focus to resettling the survivors. More tents, quilts, stoves and other relief items were being delivered Wednesday to people whose homes were uninhabitable or unsafe. Temperatures fall well below freezing overnight in an area with an average altitude of about 13,800 feet. In video aired by state broadcaster CCTV, workers could be seen erecting rows of tents with metal frames and stakes after nightfall Tuesday. Meant as temporary shelter, they were lined with quilted padding to keep out the cold. The workers distributed packaged food items to the shelter occupants, donning blue winter jackets over their orange uniforms. The confirmed death toll stood at 126 with another 188 injured



as of Tuesday evening, and no further updates were issued during the day on Wednesday. Hong Li, the director of Tibet's Emergency Management Department, told a late afternoon news conference that the work had shifted from search and rescue to resettlement and reconstruction. The earthquake struck an outlying county in the city of Shigatse, the traditional seat of the Panchen Lama, the second-highest figure in Tibetan Buddhism. It was not immedi-

ately known whether he was in his Tashi Lhunpo Monastery at the time or how much damage Tibet's second largest city sustained. The epicenter was about 25 kilometers from the main part of the city, which is called Xigaze in Chinese and sprawls across a high altitude plain. More than 500 aftershocks were recorded after the earthquake, which the US Geological Survey said measured magnitude 7.1. China's earthquake center recorded a magnitude of 6.8. The quake

was also about 75 kilometers from Mount Everest and the border with Nepal, where the shaking sent people running out of their homes in the capital. A candlelight vigil was planned on Wednesday night in Dharamsala, India, home to the Dalai Lama, Tibetan Buddhism's highest figure, and a large Tibetan population. An announcement on the Dalai Lama's website said he would lead a prayer ceremony in memory of the victims on Thursday. The Dalai Lama is viewed by the Chinese government as bent on making Tibet independent of China. Asked about the prayer ceremony, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun said, "We are very clear about the separatist nature and political schemes of the Dalai Lama and remain highly vigilant." Guo expressed confidence that the people in the earthquake zone will be able to rebuild under "the strong leadership" of China's ruling Communist Party.

Second wind-whipped wildfire burning out of control in Los Angeles area

AP ■ LOS ANGELES

A fast-moving wildfire broke out Tuesday in the inland foothills northeast of Los Angeles hours after another blaze tore through the city's Pacific Palisades neighbourhood along the coast, destroying many homes and prompting evacuation orders for tens of thousands. The Eaton fire in Altadena started near a nature preserve just before 6:30 p.m. The flames spread so rapidly that staff at a senior care centre had to push dozens of residents in wheelchairs and hospital beds down the street to a parking lot where they waited in their bedclothes for ambulances and other vehicles to take them to safety. To the west, the Pacific Palisades fire that started Tuesday morning burned out of control into the night. The Los Angeles Fire Department put out a plea for off-duty firefighters to help fight the flames that were being pushed by winds topping 60 mph (97 kph) in some places and creating chaotic scenes as residents fled. It was too windy for firefighting



aircraft to fly, hampering the fight. The Pacific Palisades fire swept through a Los Angeles hillside dotted with celebrity residences Tuesday, burning homes and prompting evacuation orders. In the frantic haste to get to safety, roadways were clogged and scores of people abandoned their vehicles and fled on foot, some toting suitcases. The traffic jam on Palisades Drive prevented emergency vehicles from getting through and a bulldozer was brought in to push the abandoned cars to

the side and create a path, according to the LA Fire Department. California Gov. Gavin Newsom, who was in Southern California to attend the naming of a national monument by President Joe Biden, made a detour to the canyon to see "firsthand the impact of these swirling winds and the embers," and he said he found "not a few — many structures already destroyed." Officials did not give an exact number of structures damaged or destroyed in the Pacific Palisades wildfire, but they said

about 30,000 residents were under evacuation orders and more than 13,000 structures were under threat. And the worst could be yet to come. The blaze began around 10:30 a.m., shortly after the start of a Santa Ana windstorm that the National Weather Service warned could be "life-threatening" and the strongest to hit Southern California in more than a decade. The exact cause of the fire was unknown and no injuries had been reported, officials said. Only about 25 miles (about 40 kilometers) northeast in Altadena, the Eaton fire was burning. The winds were expected to increase overnight and continue for days, producing isolated gusts that could top 100 mph (160 kph) in mountains and foothills — including in areas that haven't seen substantial rain in months. "By no stretch of the imagination are we out of the woods," Newsom warned residents, saying the worst of the winds are expected between 10 p.m. Tuesday and 5 a.m. Wednesday. He declared a state of emergency on Tuesday.

Impeached S Korean president's lawyers slam detention efforts as acting leader warns of clash

AP ■ SEOUL

Lawyers for impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol denounced efforts to detain him over his short-lived imposition of martial law, while the country's acting leader expressed concern Wednesday over a possible clash between law enforcement agents and presidential security personnel. As anti-corruption officials and police prepared another attempt to detain Yoon following last week's failed effort, the presidential security service fortified Yoon's compound with barbed wire and rows of tightly placed vehicles blocking the path to his residence. The Corruption Investigation

Office for High-Ranking Officials and police say they will make a more forceful effort to detain Yoon, warning that they could arrest members of the presidential security staff if they obstruct efforts to seize the embattled president. The office, which is leading a joint investigation with police and military, has been seeking Yoon's detention since he repeatedly ignored summons for questioning about whether his brief power grab on December 3 constituted rebellion. In a news conference, Yoon's lawyers challenged the legitimacy of a new detention warrant issued Tuesday by the Seoul Western District Court,

arguing that the anti-corruption agency lacks legal authority to investigate rebellion charges or order police to detain suspects. Yoon Kap-keun, one of the lawyers, urged the anti-corruption agency to either indict the president or seek a formal arrest warrant — a process that would require a court hearing. However, he said the president would only comply with an arrest warrant issued by the Seoul Central District Court, accusing the agency of deliberately choosing the Western District Court because of its allegedly favourable judge. He didn't give a clear answer when asked whether the president would appear at the Central

District Court for a hearing on an arrest warrant, saying security issues must be settled first. "People are suffering in the severe cold and government officials must be experiencing significant internal conflict," the lawyer said, referring to daily protests by both Yoon's critics and supporters near his residence. "Please consider this as us taking a step back based on good will." The liberal opposition Democratic Party, which drove the legislative effort leading to the president's impeachment on December 14, accused his lawyers of attempting to stall the process and urged the anti-corruption agency to swiftly execute the detention warrant against him.

About 150 anti-corruption agency investigators and police officers attempted to detain Yoon at his residence on Friday but retreated after a tense standoff with the presidential security service that lasted more than five hours. The investigators have not yet made another attempt to detain him. Police said they are considering "all available options" to bring Yoon into custody and haven't publicly ruled out the possibility of deploying SWAT teams, although it's unclear whether investigators would risk triggering a confrontation with presidential security forces, who are also armed. In a government meeting on Wednesday, the country's act-

ing president, Deputy Prime Minister Choi Sang-mok, urged authorities to ensure "there are no injuries to citizens or physical clashes between government agencies" in any attempt to detain Yoon. In a parliamentary hearing on Tuesday, Oh Dong-woon, the anti-corruption agency's chief prosecutor, criticised Choi for instructing police to follow the presidential security service's request to beef up security at Yoon's residence ahead of Friday's detention attempt. The police did not carry out Choi's instruction, and Oh said the agency was reviewing whether Choi's actions constituted an obstruction of official duties.

Italian journalist released from Iran, returning home

AP ■ ROME

An Italian journalist detained in Iran since December 19 and whose fate became intertwined with that of an Iranian engineer wanted by the United States was freed Wednesday and is heading home, Italian officials announced. A plane carrying Cecilia Sala took off from Tehran after "intensive work on diplomatic and intelligence channels," Premier Giorgia Meloni's office said, adding that Meloni had informed Sala's parents of the news. There was no immediate word

from the Iranian government on the journalist's release. Sala, a 29-year-old reporter for the Il Foglio daily, was detained in Tehran on December 19, three days after she arrived on a journalist visa. She was accused of violating the laws of the Islamic Republic, the official IRNA news agency said. Italian commentators had speculated that Iran was holding Sala as a bargaining chip to ensure the release of Mohammad Abedini, who was arrested at Milan's Malpensa airport three days before on December 16, on a US warrant.

GDP growth likely to be 6.3 per cent in FY25, says SBI report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The GDP growth is expected to be about 6.3 per cent in the current fiscal year, a tad lower than the government's estimates of 6.4 per cent, owing to several factors such as weak demand, SBI research report said on Wednesday.

According to the first advance estimates (FAE) of National Income for 2024-25 released by the National Statistics Office (NSO), released on Tuesday, India's economic growth rate is estimated to slip to a four-year low of 6.4 per cent in 2024-25, because of poor showing by the manufacturing and subdued investments.

Historically, the difference between the estimates of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the NSO is always in the range of 20-30 bps and hence the 6.4 per cent estimate for the 2024-25 fiscal year is along expected and reasonable lines, the SBI's research report 'Ecowrap' said.

"We, however, believe that



GDP (gross domestic product) growth for FY25 could be around 6.3 per cent, with downward bias," it said.

The report authored by Soumya Kanti Ghosh, Group Chief Economic Adviser, State Bank of India (SBI), also said as per capita nominal GDP is expected to increase significantly in the current fiscal ending March 2025, by Rs 35,000 more than 2022-23, despite a slowdown in real GDP growth and nominal GDP growth remaining almost stagnant.

The FAE of the GDP in general shows a slowdown in aggregate demand in 2024-25, it said.

The heads that have positively contributed include government consumption with a growth of 8.5 per cent in nominal terms (4.1 per cent in real terms). Exports have also held the fort with positive growth of 8 per cent (5.9 per cent in real terms). The worrying aspect of the demand is marked slowdown in gross capital formation, SBI's study said, adding that

the capital formation nominal growth declined 270 bps to 7.2 per cent.

"...Overall picture is that demand remains weak and sequential slowdown in FY25 at 6.4 per cent is an outer limit while the actual growth is definitely below the estimated figure," it said.

The report further said that the fiscal deficit at the end of November 2024 stood at Rs 8.5 lakh crore, or 52.5 per cent of the Budget Estimates (BE). However, taking into account the revised GDP figures, if tax receipts grew by the BE, government expenditure lowered due to low CAPEX then fiscal deficit will be 4.9 per cent of the GDP in 2024-25, SBI's research said.

While, if government sticks to the fiscal deficit of Rs 16.1 lakh crore, then with the revised GDP numbers, the deficit as per cent of GDP would be at 5 per cent in 2024-25, the report said.

In the Union Budget, the government projected to bring down the fiscal deficit to 4.9 per cent of the GDP in the current financial year.

Budget should focus on tax simplification, reduction in personal I-T: EY

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Budget is expected to focus on boosting private capex, tax simplification and reduction in personal income tax, particularly for the lower-income groups, to stimulate demand, EY India said.

The Union Budget for 2025-26 is scheduled to be presented in Parliament on February 1.

EY India, in its Budget expectation note, said with over Rs 31 lakh crore stuck in income tax disputes as of 2023-24, there is an urgent need to clear Commissioner of Income Tax (Appeals) backlog and bolster alternate dispute resolution mechanisms like advance pricing agreements and safe harbours.

"While a full comprehensive review of the direct tax code may take time, we might see some initial steps towards its implementation in this Budget. I also hope for a reduction in personal income tax, particularly for the lower-income groups, to provide relief and stimulate demand," said Sameer Gupta, National Tax Leader, EY India.

EY said the expectations from Budget are focused on a set of strategic reforms that can



propel the economy forward.

With an emphasis on fiscal consolidation, tax system simplification, and investment-driven growth, the Budget is expected to lay a solid foundation for sustained economic development.

EY anticipates significant reforms to simplify the tax system and improve taxpayer services, reduce litigation, and enhance tax compliance.

The government is already working on simplifying the Income Tax laws. It should follow a consultative approach and invite public comments on the draft proposals, EY said.

"Key areas of focus are likely to include enhancing public spending, reducing the fiscal

deficit, incentivising private sector investment, and introducing targeted tax reforms that foster business innovation," EY said.

In the last Budget, government had rationalised the capital gains structure in terms of holding period of assets and tax rates. The government may further address some of the unintended anomalies to make the rationalisation of capital gains more complete, EY said.

For instance, the holding period for capital assets, such as business undertakings in slump sales may be reduced from 36 months to 24 months and unlisted shares in IPO offer for sale (OFS) from 2 years to 1 year, aligning them

with listed securities.

Gupta further said for businesses, particularly SMEs, reducing the complexity of tax compliance is critical.

To achieve sustainable growth in FY26, the government must prioritise reducing the fiscal deficit to 4.5 per cent of GDP in FY26 while reducing the debt-to-GDP ratio, which stands at 54.4 per cent, well above the fiscal responsibility and budget management (FRBM) target of 40 per cent.

A medium-term real GDP growth target of 6.5 per cent or higher will require boosting the aggregate investment rate (GFCF) measured at constant prices to 34 per cent.

This can be achieved by increasing the government's capital expenditure, improving capital efficiency and encouraging states to enhance their investment spending.

To stimulate private sector investment, a progressive reduction in interest rates should be considered. Additionally, targeted employment schemes should be fast-tracked to uplift urban demand and support economic momentum in FY26, EY said.

Govt revises gold import data from April; cuts Nov figures by USD 5 Billion to USD 9.84 Billion

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government has revised gold import data, bringing down numbers for November by USD 5 billion to USD 9.84 billion, possibly to rectify double accounting of inbound shipments.

According to revised data of the commerce ministry arm Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics (DGCIS), gold import numbers have been slashed since April 2024, revealing excess imports of about USD 11.7 billion during the first eight months of 2024-25.

The revision was prompted by an unusual surge in imports of the precious metal in November 2024, leading to record import of USD 69.95 billion and the highest ever trade deficit of USD 37.84 billion.

Noticing the jump, the commerce ministry started examining if there were any calculation or accounting mistakes in the compilation of the gold imports data.

Kolkata-based DGCIS is an organisation for the collection, compilation and dissemination of India's trade statistics and commercial information.

The revised data published on the DGCIS website showed a difference of about USD 11.7 billion for April-November 2024-25.

The cumulative gold import during April-November 2024-25 worked out to be USD 37.38 billion as against the earlier estimates of USD 49.08 billion.

According to the revised DGCIS data, the inbound shipments in April, May, June, July, August, September and October 2024 were USD 2.95



billion (as against earlier estimate of USD 3.11 billion), USD 2.91 billion (USD 3.33 billion), USD 2.47 billion (USD 3.06 billion), USD 2.57 billion (USD 3.13 billion), USD 8.64 billion (USD 10.06 billion), USD 3.3 billion (USD 4.39 billion), and USD 4.67 billion (USD 7.12 billion), respectively.

After the revision, the trade deficit -- difference between imports and exports -- for November is expected to be revised downwards to USD 32.84 billion. Similarly, there will be a revision in imports as well as trade deficit numbers for the last eight months of the current fiscal year.

During April-November 2023-24, gold imports stood at USD 32.92 billion.

A query sent to the commerce ministry on the issue remained unanswered.

Prices of the yellow metal have increased 17 per cent so far this fiscal year to Rs 80,000 per 10 gm in the national capital.

In the Budget, the government slashed the duty from 15 per cent to 6 per cent.

India's gold imports, which have a bearing on the country's current account deficit (CAD), surged 30 per cent to USD 45.54 billion in 2023-24.

India imports the largest

amount of gold from Switzerland, which has about 40 per cent share, followed by the UAE (over 16 per cent), and South Africa (about 10 per cent).

The precious metal accounts for over 5 per cent of the country's total imports.

India is the world's second-biggest gold consumer after China. The imports mainly take care of the demand by the jewellery industry. Gems and jewellery exports last month declined 25.32 per cent year-on-year to USD 17.43 billion.

The country's CAD widened marginally to USD 9.7 billion, or 1.1 per cent of the GDP, in April-June 2024 against USD 8.9 billion, or 1 per cent, in the year-ago period.

A current account deficit occurs when the value of goods and services imported and other payments exceed the value of export of goods and services and other receipts by a country in a particular period.

Commenting on the revision, economic think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) Founder Ajay Srivastava said the DGCIS on January 8, "quietly revised without any explanation" India's gold import figures for November 2024 by a significant USD 5 billion.

India must speed up hybrid technology adoption in pulses, oilseeds to reduce imports: P K Mishra

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India needs to accelerate adoption of hybrid technology in pulses and oilseeds to address production deficits, while acknowledging the challenges faced by farmers in implementing these advanced farm practices, Principal Secretary to Prime Minister P K Mishra said on Wednesday.

Mishra highlighted that despite showing promising results, hybrid varieties, particularly in crops like pigeon pea ('toor dal'), have not achieved widespread adoption among farmers.

"These two crops need our attention much more than what we did so far," he said while inaugurating the national symposium organised by Trust for Advancement of Agricultural Sciences (TAAS) here.

While some hybrid mustard seeds are available in the market, their performance compared to open-pollinated varieties requires further investigation, he said.

Addressing the limitation of annual seed purchases -- a requirement for hybrid crops -- Mishra mentioned ongoing global research efforts to develop technologies allowing farmers to save and reuse hybrid seeds. "This will help saving on the cost of seeds."

Highlighting challenges faced in adoption of hybrid seeds, Mishra said India's pioneering work in hybrid technology, which revolutionized crops like maize and cotton, faces uneven adoption across different crops despite its proven potential to boost productivity and climate resilience.



The country's early achievements in hybrid technology, starting with the first cotton hybrid in 1970, demonstrated significant success in cross-pollinated crops. However, adoption rates remain surprisingly low in key staples like rice, where hybrid varieties cover only 8 per cent of the total cultivated area despite 35 years of technology introduction.

"Hybrid technology has shown remarkable superiority in many cross-pollinated, low-volume and high-value field and horticultural crops," he said. "However, in field crops except maize, pearl millet and cotton, hybrids have not occupied larger areas."

India's vegetable production success story underscores hybrid technology's potential, reaching 213 million tonne in 2022-23 with an average productivity of 19 tonne per hectare. The official attributed this achievement largely to hybrid variety adoption.

The country's hybrid rice programme, launched in 1989 with the support of UNDP and FAO following China's success, has yielded several varieties from public sector

institutions. However, he said hybrid rice varieties must significantly outperform pure line varieties under optimal conditions to drive wider adoption.

ICAR's hybrid development programmes have shown particular strength in 'bajra', sorghum, and maize. "The concept of single cross hybrids in maize has revolutionized maize productivity," Public sector institutions have successfully released hybrids in various crops including rice, pigeon pea, mustard, tomato, and cauliflower. However, experts emphasize the need to understand farmers' reluctance to adopt hybrid varieties in certain crops.

"Unless the hybrids successfully compete with best pure line varieties at optimum management conditions and higher profits, area expansion will not happen," the official added, highlighting the need for focused research to improve hybrid yield potential.

Research priorities now include developing hybrids that offer clear advantages in productivity, nutrition, and

stress resistance while remaining economically viable for farmers.

The government has introduced guidelines for gene editing technology, which could potentially accelerate crop improvement. These advanced tools, including marker-assisted selection, are expected to enhance breeding precision and expedite hybrid development with targeted traits.

Mishra emphasized the need for robust public-private partnerships (PPP) to overcome implementation challenges. Key areas requiring attention include strengthening intellectual property rights, protecting plant varieties, and developing efficient seed production systems.

Despite inherent complexities in hybrid breeding programmes, including inbreeding depression and infrastructure requirements, Mishra expressed optimism about recent advancements in genomics and biotechnology offering solutions to these challenges.

The focus remains on making scientific research relevant to farmers' needs while working towards reducing India's dependence on pulse imports, the official added.

TAAS Chairman R S Paroda called for a clear policy on genetically-modified crops and incentives like tax exemption for seed industry.

ICAR Director General Himanshu Pathak, Federation of Seed Industry of India Chairman Ajai Rana, ICRISAT Director General Standford Blade were among others present at the three-day event ending January 10.

Cybersecurity firm Rubrik announces its expansion plans in India

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Cybersecurity firm Rubrik announced its expansion plans in India with the opening of a new office space in Bengaluru.

The new facility, which intends to replace the operations of the company's existing two offices in the city over a period of time, is expected to open by mid of 2025.

"The new facility will combine product development, product management, customer support, and global recovery operations under one roof," a company statement said.

Company co-founder and CEO Bipul Sinha also announced plans to hire talent from India for the expansion.

"By investing in top engineering talent, we believe we will continue to create innovative solutions that enhance Rubrik's portfolio and support our global growth," he added.

"India is in the midst of a massive digital transformation, and we believe there is a huge opportunity for Rubrik to help secure its digital future. There is a large pool of talent here.

India is an economy with an extremely fast growth rate. Outside the US, India is one of the largest locations for the company in terms of headcount," he said, adding that the company expects to invest "hundreds of million dollars" in the country.

Rupee plunges 13 paise to settle at new record low of 85.87 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee extended its slide for the second straight session and declined 13 paise to hit a fresh record low of 85.87 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday amid higher crude oil prices and stronger American currency.

Lacklustre sentiment in domestic equity markets and sustained outflow of foreign funds also played spoilsport even as investors stayed cautious over lower economic growth projection by the government, forex analysts said.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 85.82 and touched the lowest-ever level of 85.89 against the greenback during intra-day. The unit settled at 85.87 (provisional) against the dollar, 13 paise lower than its previous close.

On Tuesday, the rupee settled with a loss of 6 paise at 85.74 against the dollar.



Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.35 per cent higher at 108.76.

The 10-year US bond yields also remained elevated at 4.67 per cent amid expectations of delayed interest rate cuts by the Federal Reserve.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, climbed 0.90 per cent to USD 77.74 per barrel in futures trade.

In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex skid 50.62 points, or 0.06 per cent, to settle at 78,148.49 points, while the Nifty fell 18.95 points, or 0.08 per cent, to 23,688.95 points.

Expect RBI to cut interest rates next month; Budget must focus on job creation: CII president

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Industry body CII expects the RBI to cut the benchmark interest rates next month to support sagging growth, its President Sanjiv Puri said on Wednesday and stressed the need to boost job creation through targeted interventions for labour-intensive sectors in the upcoming Budget.

In an interview with PTI, Puri flagged "sticky" food inflation, highlighting the need to build agricultural resilience and de-linking it from the interest rates under the inflation targeting framework, arguing that it is on account of climate change and not really influenced by the monetary policy.

Puri is also the Chairman and Managing Director of ITC.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is slated to present the Budget in Parliament on February 1.

The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) chief also expressed optimism that much-needed labour reforms will be taken up by the BJP-led NDA government in the third term, stressing that it would benefit the economy and create more jobs.

Puri also raised the issue of dumping excess stock by China globally, including India, and urged the government to look



at an "accelerated way of implementing minimum import price and anti-dumping duty" for specified sectors like steel, paperboard, chemicals and polymers.

Responding to a question on the potential impact on India after the Donald Trump-led administration assumes office in the US this month, the CII President said we should focus on the areas where there is opportunity and where we can really play on our strengths.

"...Now, what Trump will do, etc. What the US will do? I think at this point of time, it would be very speculative when it happens, that we will address," Puri said.

He informed that public spending is picking up and consumption should also gain momentum, pointing out that CII expects a rate cut by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

"In fact, we are also suggesting that in the inflation targeting framework, I think food inflation should be de-linked from interest rates, from the monetary policy. Food inflation is on account of climate change and not really influenced by monetary policy," Puri said.

CII recommends setting up some kind of an institutional mechanism to look at labour reforms across a number of sectors, he added.

Puri called for introducing targeted interventions in labour-intensive sectors like apparel, footwear, furniture, tourism and real estate, asserting that tourism could benefit from "infrastructure status" whereas garments can benefit from a Production Linked Incentive (PLI) 2.0 scheme.

CII, in its Budget suggestions for 2025-26, has recommended lowering the excise duty on fuel to boost consumption, especially at the lower income level, arguing that fuel prices significantly drive inflation.

The Budget could also consider reducing marginal tax rates for personal income up to Rs 20 lakh per annum.

INBRIEF

HINDUSTAN ZINC UPLIFTS OVER 1,700 STUDENTS THROUGH SHIKSHA SAMBAL WINTER CAMP

UDAIPUR: Hindustan Zinc Limited (NSE: HINDZINC), India's largest and the world's second-largest integrated zinc producer, successfully concluded its education focussed Shiksha Sambal winter camp, supporting nearly 1,700 students from underprivileged rural hinterland.

BSES AND AIIMS UNITE FOR ECO FRIENDLY MOBILITY'S 24

BSES and AIIMS (All India Institute of Medical Sciences) have joined hands for promoting eco friendly mobility. In a landmark initiative to promote green mobility and better accessibility within the sprawling 213-acre AIIMS campus, BSES is providing 27 zero-pollution electric buses to the premier health facility under its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) program for the hospital's Free In-Campus Shuttle Service.

PROTECTING OUR BIRDS, PROTECTING OUR FUTURE

AMRITSAR: Webinar on "National Bird Day 2025" with "Theme Protecting Our Birds, Protecting Our Future" was organized by Department of Botanical and Environmental Sciences, Guru Nanak Dev University to create awareness regarding bird diversity and related issues.

Isak strikes again as Newcastle beats Arsenal 2-0 in League Cup semifinal

PTI ■ LONDON

Newcastle moved a step closer to a first major domestic trophy since 1955 with a 2-0 victory over Arsenal in the first leg of the English League Cup semifinals. Goals from Alexander Isak and Anthony Gordon at the Emirates Stadium put Newcastle within reach of the final at Wembley Stadium in March. The second leg is at St James' Park on Feb. 5. "It's a great result. It's only the first half. If we don't go through then this has no meaning, but we can't hide from the fact that this is a massive win," Isak said. It was Newcastle's first win at the Emirates since 2010 and Arsenal's first home defeat since April.

Isak struck in the 37th minute to continue his outstanding scoring run with his 14th goal in 15 games. The Sweden international was involved in Newcastle's second in the 51st, when his shot was saved by Arsenal goalkeeper David Raya and the rebound was converted by Gordon. Despite being bought by Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund in 2021, Newcastle hasn't won a major domestic trophy since lifting the FA Cup almost 70 years ago. But it is close to second League Cup final in three years after losing to Manchester United in 2023. Newcastle is also pushing for a return to the Champions League after missing out last season — sitting fifth in the Premier League standings and one point outside of the



qualifying places for European club soccer's elite tournament. Victory against Arsenal was a seventh straight win in all competitions for Eddie Howe's team, which has been inspired by Isak's brilliant goal-scoring form. He fired in off the underside of the crossbar from close range after a long free kick was played into his path by Jacob Murphy. It was Isak's seventh goal in his last five games. Despite in-stadium referee announcements being trialed for the match, an apparent push in the buildup to his goal did not result in referee Craig Pawson reviewing the sideline monitor. It was Isak's sharpness that led to Newcastle's second. His effort from inside the box six minutes into the

second half was parried by Raya, but Gordon was the quickest to react at the far post to fire home. Arsenal was unbeaten in 13 games in all competitions and is second in the Premier League standings. It had the chance to take the lead when Gabriel Martinelli burst through in the 29th and fired against the post. Kai Havertz wasted a golden opportunity to pull a goal back when his attempted header from directly in front of goal came off his shoulder and went wide. "We rode our luck a little bit at times, but (I'm) really pleased with the result," Howe said. Tottenham plays Liverpool in the other semifinal, with the first leg being staged at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium on Wednesday.



Women's Hockey India League will provide financial stability to junior players: Savita Punia

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Hoping to continue playing till the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics, India's seasoned goalkeeper Savita Punia feels the introduction of Women's Hockey India League will provide financial stability, especially to junior players and attract more youngsters to the sport. The inaugural edition of the league will be held from January 12-26. "Every player wants financial stability, can buy good equipments, make their family stress free, help their family when they need. We are in the national team for long and whenever we win medals the government gives us awards and rewards," Savita told PTI during an interview. "But when a junior player gets such a good amount, she doesn't have to take that financial tension. She just needs to play and we as seniors only tell them this. But you can't deviate from your goal, the sport. First priority is preference whether it's hockey or any sport," she said. "Parents can now at least relax that there is future in hockey, we can involve our wards in hockey," the former India captain added. The veteran of nearly 300 international matches is 34 now but she has no plans to retire and wants to continue until the end of the LA Games in 2028, provided she remains fit and enjoys playing the game. "Definitely (I want to play in 2028), but being a girl I always felt that there will be pressure from my parents, but I always feel proud that my parents always respected my

decisions. "After I got married, I must have done something good that I got so supportive in-laws and husband who always backed my dream. I am blessed in that sense," Savita said. Savita, who has three Asian Games medals including one silver and two bronze under her belt besides a Commonwealth Games gold, was a member of the Indian team that finished a creditable fourth in the Tokyo Olympics in 2021. "The focus is on 2026 World Cup and Asian Games and both the families told me if you want to play LA Olympics we are there for you. I don't have any hesitation about telling my age or anything, my goal is if I am fit and enjoy hockey, I will continue playing. "I started to enjoy playing hockey from the last five-seven years," she said. Savita will be representing Soorma Hockey Club in the upcoming women's HIL starting in Ranchi, in which she will lead the team alongside current national team skipper Salima Tete. Savita said the first-ever HIL will be a game changer for women's hockey not only in India but across the world. "It will be beneficial for all of us. We senior players have played with international stars and have that experience but for young players who are new into the system it is a big platform. "If you simply talk about our team Soorma, there are good international players from Holland, Germany, Belgium, England. We get to learn from their training regime and intensity and discuss among

ourselves. "When we look at their attitude and energy on the ground, we realise that we also have to do like them. The mindset is changing and it is a very good platform for young players. "They share their process of training with us and we do the same and it is beneficial for both. The league will inspire the youth to take up hockey after watching the intense matches. It's a big opportunity for junior players," she added. By her own admission, Savita doesn't miss the national team captaincy as she feels she already has immense responsibility as a senior player. "I always take responsibility being a senior goalkeeper or senior player. "When I was made the captain, definitely there was pressure on me but I took it in my stride. I never felt extra pressure. I always respected the decision of the coaches. As a goalkeeper I had my own responsibilities," she said. She was full of praise for new women's hockey team coach Harendra Singh, under whose guidance India defended the Asian Champions Trophy title in Rajgir, Bihar recently. "A new coach needs time to deliver and understand the system. Every coach wants to teach the best and when Harendra sir came, there was not much difficulty because he coached us in 2017 as well," she said. "In Pro League he took 24 players and tried everyone, he tried a few players in new positions. He told us not to take tension about results, 'I will look into it, you just play your hockey.'"

France coach Didier Deschamps says he will leave after 2026 World Cup

PTI ■ PARIS

Didier Deschamps announced Wednesday that he won't continue as France coach after the next World Cup, bringing an end to an era in which he became the nation's most successful manager over more than a decade. The 56-year-old Deschamps said in an interview with broadcaster TF1 that he will leave when his contract expires in the summer of 2026. "I've been here since 2012, I'm scheduled to be here until 2026, the next World Cup, but that's where it's going to end because it has to end at some point," Deschamps said in excerpts of the interview to be aired later Wednesday. "I did my time, with the same desire and the same passion to keep the French team at the highest level, but 2026 is all very well." Deschamps started in his role as a successor to Laurent Blanc. After a period marred by the 2010 World Cup debacle — where the players went on strike in protest against then-coach Raymond Domenech — and off-pitch controversies, Deschamps led France to victory at the 2018 World Cup, also reaching the final in 2022 and at the 2021 European Championship. At the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, France lost an epic title match to Argentina. "I'm not here for the records," said Deschamps, who also won the 2021



Nations League with France. "The most important thing is that the France team remains at the top as it has been for many years." Deschamps is one of only three people in soccer history to have won the World Cup as both a player and a coach, along with Mario Zagallo (Brazil) and Franz Beckenbauer (West Germany). He has the highest number of wins (105) of any France coach, ahead of Michel Hidalgo and Domenech (tied at 41). Deschamps found himself in a difficult position after the Euros last year, where France lost 2-1 to Spain in the semifinals without impressing. France was widely criticized for its pragmatic and dull style of play at Euro 2024, with Randal Kolo Muani's header against Spain the team's first and only goal from open play by a France player all tournament.

But he has kept the confidence of French federation president Philippe Diallo. "He's still just as motivated and ready to wear the colors of the French team," Diallo told L'Equipe newspaper, adding that he did not believe Deschamps is tired of the job. "Didier Deschamps' career has been exceptional, marked by the most prestigious titles," he said. "At the Euros, it was another semifinal in a major tournament. He was not affected by fatigue or criticism. After the competition, I asked him the question. His clear answer was that he was fully committed and energized to continue his mission. And that's exactly what he's doing, as we finished top of our group for the Nations League. He is still the greatest coach the French team has ever had."

As a player, Deschamps captained France to victory at the 1998 World Cup and 2000 European Championship. He also won the Champions League with Marseille in 1993 and Juventus in 1996. Before taking charge of France's national team, he coached Monaco to the 2003-04 Champions League final and guided Juventus back to Serie A. Deschamps also achieved success at Marseille, winning the Ligue 1 title in 2010. Europe will send 16 teams to the first 48-team World Cup, being co-hosted by the United States, Canada and Mexico in the summer of 2026. Deschamps did not elaborate on his future beyond the tournament. "There is a life afterwards," he said. "I don't know what it will be." His planned departure will leave plenty of time for Diallo to find the right successor to Deschamps, with former France great Zinedine Zidane the overwhelming favorite if he is still interested in the job. Zidane, who helped to lead Les Bleus as a player to their first World Cup title in 1998 and starred again when they won the European Championship in 2000, scored in two World Cup finals and was on the losing side once when he headbutted Italy's Marco Materazzi in the 2006 final on his final match as a player. As a coach, Zidane led Real Madrid to three consecutive Champions League titles.

BFI adopts World Boxing's new weight classes

PTI ■ BAREILLY

The Boxing Federation of India (BFI) is conducting the men's national championships here in 10 weight categories, in line with the classification introduced by the breakaway World Boxing. The ongoing event is being held under World Boxing's Technical and Competition Rules, which has 10 instead of the 13 weight categories that feature in the suspended International Boxing Association's (IBA) roster. The new weight classes are 50kg (Flyweight), 55kg (Bantamweight), 60kg (Lightweight), 65kg (Welterweight), 70kg (Light Middleweight), 75kg (Middleweight), 80kg (Light Heavyweight), 85kg (Cruiserweight), 90kg (Heavyweight) and +90kg (Super Heavyweight). Out of these, six categories -- 55kg, 60kg, 65, 70kg, 80kg, and 90kg -- are marked as potential Olympics weight categories.



The new categories for women are 48kg (Light Flyweight) is the first division followed by 51kg (Flyweight), 54kg (Bantamweight), 57kg (Featherweight), 60kg (Lightweight), 65kg (Welterweight), 70kg (Light Middleweight), 75kg (Middleweight), 80kg (Light Heavyweight), 85kg (Heavyweight), 90kg (Super Heavyweight). World Boxing is a breakaway international body aiming to secure recognition from the

International Olympic Committee and ensure that boxing remains on the Olympic roster. Formed in April last year after the International Boxing Association was stripped of its status, WB has managed to pull in requisite 60 members and the IOC is expected to take a call on its recognition early next year. India joined WB a few weeks ago. Govind Sahani kicks off Nationals with win

Meanwhile, Strandja Memorial silver-medallist Govind Sahani started his Nationals campaign with a commanding win over Mohammad Aarif of Jammu and Kashmir on the opening day on Tuesday. Devendra Solanki of Rajasthan kicked off the tournament in style, defeating Donald Winston Janumala in the flyweight (47-50kg) category on Tuesday. In the bantamweight (50-55kg) division, Badal of Himachal Pradesh emerged victorious against Mizoram's Lalhruiatluanga. The lightweight category saw Goa's Nitesh Chawan outclass Kerala's Mohamed Athif with a dominant 5-0 win, while Arunachal's Ito Ado secured a hard-fought victory over Himanshu Singh. Bhanu Prakash defeated Ashish in the welterweight (60-65kg) category, while the (70-75kg) weight class featured impressive wins by Nikhil Dubey and Arshpreet Singh Bhatti.

Bhambri makes quarters in Auckland

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

In a mixed bag for India on the ATP Tour on Wednesday, Yuki Bhambri and his French partner Albano Olivetti advanced to quarterfinals of the ASB Classic in Auckland but N Sriram Balaji exited the Adelaide International with pre-quarterfinal defeat alongside Miguel Reyes-Varela. Bhambri and Olivetti edged past the pair of Sander Arends and Luke Johnson 6-4 6-4 in the round of 16, winning in 71 minutes. They will next take on the winners of the match between Julian Cash/Lloyd Glasspool and Ajeet Rai/Kiranpal Pannu. Balaji and his Mexican partner made a tremendous start by taking the first set from Harri Heliövaara and Henry Patten but eventually lost 6-3 3-6 13-11 to the fourth seeds in a grueling contest that lasted one hour and 23 minutes.

Anju Bobby George named chairperson of AFI's athletes commission

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

Long-jump great Anju Bobby George was on Wednesday named chairperson of the Athletics Federation of India's nine-strong athletes commission that features six women with javelin throw star Neeraj Chopra being its most prominent male member. The other women in the new panel are runner Jyotirmoyee Sikdar, discus thrower Krishna Poonia, hurdler MD Valsamma, steeplechaser Sudha Singh and runner Sunita Rani. George, a 2003 world championships bronze-winner, is also a senior vice president in the AFI. All of them are retired and their induction is a noteworthy milestone in the AFI's quest for

gender parity in its set-up. The previous commission featured four women. The commission was unveiled on Wednesday after the elections held in October last year. Two-time Olympic medal-winning Neeraj Chopra is one of the four nominated members after consultations by the AFI's executive council. The other two male members of the commission are 3000m steeplechaser Avinash Sable and newly-elected AFI president Bahadur Singh Sagoo, a shot put gold medal winner at 2002 Asian Games. Sagoo was the chairman of the previous commission. Outgoing AFI treasurer Madhu Kant Pathak, who was the returning officer for the elections, said the polls were held after



following due process. "Election notification was issued and other rules and regulations were followed. Five members were elected. "Later, after consultation with the

executive council, four members including Neeraj and Sable were added as Athletes Commission member. Both Neeraj and Sable initially said that they will not be able to give much time as they are active athletes but they accepted," said Pathak. Sumariwalla made ex-officio member. Outgoing AFI President Adille Sumariwalla will continue to be a part of the executive council as an ex-officio member as he is a part of the World Athletics Council. The 67-year-old Sumariwalla, who served as AFI president for three consecutive terms from 2012, is currently an executive board member of World Athletics -- the international governing body of the sport. "We amended the AFI

constitution last year to the effect that any person who is in the World Athletics council will be an ex-officio member of the AFI executive council," AFI Planning Commission Chairman Lalit Bhanot announced on the concluding day of the Annual General Body Meeting here. On Tuesday, Sumariwalla had insisted that he is not going anywhere and will be around to guide the new office-bearers of the AFI and act as the body's spokesperson too. On Wednesday, Sagoo announced that Sumariwalla will also be the chairman of the committee which will liaise with the government as well as international bodies. In addition, he will be a member of the Ethics Commission of the AFI.

Domestic schedule In another decision, Indian athletics' first major national senior championships of the season -- the Federation Cup -- will be held in Kozhikode, Kerala, from April 21-24. Haryana's Panchkula was to host the event but expressed its inability to do so as it had conducted the National Inter-State Championships in June last year. This year's National Inter-State Senior Championships will be held from August 20 to 24 in Chennai, as proposed in the tentative calendar. National Open Championships, earlier proposed to be held in Pune or Bengaluru, will now be staged in Ranchi from September 27 to 30.

Bumrah continues to remain No. 1 in Test rankings

PTI ■ DUBAI

India's pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah continued to reign supreme at the top of the bowlers' chart with a career-best rating of 908 in the latest ICC Test Rankings, released on Wednesday. Bumrah, who made history ahead of the fifth and final Test against Australia by recording the highest-ever ICC Rankings rating for an Indian bowler at 907 points, improved that tally by one point after taking two wickets in the first innings at the SCG. However, a back spasm ruled him out of bowling in the second innings, restricting his role to just batting. Left-arm spinner Ravindra Jadeja, who climbed a spot to be joint-ninth, is the other Indian giving Bumrah company in the top-10. He shares the ninth spot with Australian pacer Scott Boland, who has made a remarkable leap of 29 places to break into the top 10. Boland's stellar performance in the Sydney Test, where he



claimed a 10-wicket haul (4/31 and 6/45), proved too much for the Indian batters on a lively pitch. His efforts were instrumental in Australia's triumph, ending a decade-long wait to reclaim the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. Australia skipper Pat Cummins also made gains in the rankings, climbing to number two after picking up five wickets in the final match. South Africa's Kagiso Rabada rose a spot to occupy the third place while injured Josh Hazlewood moved down two places to be fourth. Rishabh Pant's blistering 33-ball 61 in the second innings earned him a three-spot rise in the batting rankings, moving him to number nine while India opener Yashasvi Jaiswal retained his fourth spot. South Africa captain Temba Bavuma extended his rich vein of form, scoring a vital century in the first innings to climb three spots to number six, also achieving a career-best rating of 769.



Sam Konstas regrets stand-off with Jasprit

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Australian teenage batting sensation Sam Konstas regrets his involvement in the stand-off with Jasprit Bumrah during the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, admitting he was only trying to waste time but ultimately, the Indian pace spearhead had the "last laugh". Konstas made an impact in the final two Tests of the series with his audacious strokeplay, but also found himself at the center of a couple of fiery exchanges with Indian stars Bumrah and Virat Kohli. One such incident occurred on the opening day of the fifth Test, when Konstas had a heated run-in with Bumrah. "I love being in the contest and always try to put my best foot forward," Konstas told CODE Sports. Near the end of the day's play, Bumrah, looking to get in one more over, was met with resistance from the Australian players, who were trying to waste time. This led to a fiery exchange of words between Konstas and the Indian pacer. Two deliveries later, Bumrah, who was leading the side in the absence of an off-colour Rohit Sharma, took the wicket of Usman Khawaja off the last ball. After dismissing Khawaja, Bumrah walked in Konstas' direction and stared him down. Reflecting on the incident,

Konstas admitted, "I feel like it's probably a good learning for me. I was trying to waste a little bit of time there so they didn't get another over. But he (Bumrah) had the last laugh. "Obviously he is world class and he took, what, 32 wickets in the series." Konstas seems to have learned his lesson about not provoking the peerless pacer. "If that happened again, maybe I wouldn't have said anything," he said. The teenager was also involved in an on-field exchange with Kohli, who shoulder-charged Konstas, followed by a heated verbal exchange between the two. However, Konstas revealed that despite the incident, he later went to speak with his childhood hero Kohli. "I had a little chat after the game telling him that I idolise him, and it's obviously a huge honour playing against him," Konstas said. "When I did verse him, I was like, 'wow, Virat Kohli is batting.' He just had that presence about him, all the Indian crowd getting amongst it. Chanting his name. It was quite surreal." Konstas added that "He was very down to earth. A lovely person and just wishing me all the best saying hopefully I go well on the tour of Sri Lanka he said if I'm in. "My whole family loves Virat. I've idolised him from a young age and he's a legend of the game."



Prasidh Krishna, Devdutt, Washington available for Vijay Hazare knockouts

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Karnataka's Prasidh Krishna, Devdutt Padikkal and Tamil Nadu all-rounder Washington Sundar will be available for the Vijay Hazare Trophy knockout matches, starting in Vadodara from Thursday, after featuring in the recent Border-Gavaskar Trophy series against Australia. However, KL Rahul, who played all the five Test matches against the Aussies, has requested for a break and will skip the Hazare knockouts. Rahul's availability for the second phase of the Ranji Trophy, beginning on January 23, will be decided at a later date. India head coach Gautam Gambhir had recently expressed his desire to see frontline Indian players making themselves available for the remainder of the premier domestic red-ball tournament. Washington, though, could link up with Tamil Nadu only if the team progresses to the semifinals of the Vijay Hazare Trophy. He played three matches and made 114 runs with a fifty but bowled just 37 overs across those Tests as pacers were preferred because of the conditions. The off-spinner took just three wickets. Prasidh will be high on confidence after making a good impression in the fifth

Test at Sydney, where the pacer grabbed six Australian wickets — 3/42 in the first innings and 3/65 in the second essay. Devdutt played just one Test match at Perth, primarily because skipper Rohit Sharma stayed back in India to welcome his second baby. The left-hander made a zero and 25 in India's 295-run win at Perth but was not selected for any of the other four Test matches. The 24-year-old was in terrific form prior to leaving for Australia for the India A tour, smashing four First-Class hundreds across Duleep Trophy and in the first leg of the Ranji Trophy. Both Prasidh and Devdutt are scheduled to join the Karnataka squad on January 10, a day ahead of their quarterfinal match against Baroda at Vadodara. Nitish Kumar Reddy too will fly out of Australia on Wednesday but he will not be seen in action immediately as Andhra has not progressed to the knockout stage. However, Nitish, who impressed everyone with his gutsy batting Down Under including a hundred at Melbourne, is likely to play in the second phase of the Ranji Trophy. He has played only one match this season before travelling to Australia.

Virat Kohli is always super motivated, he will know what to do: Faf du Plessis

PTI ■ CAPE TOWN

Virat Kohli will be "super motivated" to put a struggling phase behind him and the premier India batter is capable of returning to his run-making ways, said former South African captain Faf du Plessis here on Wednesday. Kohli had a torrid time in Australia during the recent Border-Gavaskar Trophy, amassing a mere 190 runs at an average of 23.75 across five Tests despite starting off with an unbeaten hundred in the first Test at Perth. Du Plessis backed Kohli, his one-time teammate at Royal Challengers Bangalore, to come back stronger from the struggles, and said retirement is a "very personal" choice. "That is very, very personal. No one can speak to you about when that time is (up) as a player, you'll know," du Plessis told PTI on the sidelines of the SA20 Season 3's Captain's Day. "I know someone like him is super super motivated, he's gone through it all before, so he knows exactly what to do,"



said Du Plessis. The 40-year-old then went back to the day when he felt his time was up as a Test cricketer. "It is different for every player. Every player needs to answer that question. I remember when that time was for me," he said. "I just knew that certainly from the Test cricket perspective for me, I didn't have that same hunger and drive anymore and I felt that that stage certainly for me was a good time to let new guys come in and also step into the

T20 world. "I wanted to do that at the stage where I still felt like I was on top of my game," he added. Du Plessis was not pleased with ICC reportedly exploring the possibility of a two-tier Test system. "No, I think we need the game to be healthy," Du Plessis said. "We saw over the last few years the value that was put on Test cricket by Australia, England and India making sure that there were 4-5 Test series. "When you look at the other teams, there are two Test

BGT: SCG track deemed 'satisfactory', other pitches rated 'very good' by ICC

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Four out of five pitches used in the recent Border-Gavaskar Test series between India and Australia have been rated 'very good' by the ICC, which found the track for the fifth and final game in Sydney to be 'satisfactory'. The marquee five-match series ended 3-1 in favour of the hosts, who regained the Border Gavaskar Trophy after a decade and also qualified for the World Test Championship final in June against South Africa. "The pitches at Perth Stadium, Adelaide Oval, Gabba and Melbourne Cricket Ground — the venues for the first four Tests — were rated as 'very good'; the ICC said in a statement.

"Meanwhile, the surface for the final Test in Sydney received a 'satisfactory', the second-highest rating on ICC's scale," it added. The traditionally batting-friendly pitch at the Sydney Cricket Ground favoured bowlers this time. Batters from both the teams struggled for the majority of the Test which ended in two and half days. "We encourage pitches that bring out the unique characteristics of that venue and this has long been a feature of Australian cricket," Cricket Australia's Head of Cricket Operations Peter Roach said in a media release while reacting to the ICC's ratings. "We don't look to prepare wickets that favour the home



side or suit our situation in a series. What we seek is a good contest between bat and ball and pitches that are likely to produce a result. "Weather obviously plays a

significant part in preparation and we know that even our most skilled curators are challenged at times by adverse weather," he added.

The Sydney track had a green top with variable bounce on offer and as many as 26 wickets fell on the first two days while four Indians and as many Australians were dismissed on day three as bowlers largely dominated the proceedings. "The SCG has been striving to bring out their unique characteristics of early pace and bounce before the pitch wears and spins," Roach said. "This year was a step in the right direction to achieving this which provided an exciting finish to the Border Gavaskar Trophy series and bodes well for the Ashes summer in 2025-26," he added. There was some debate around the SCG track after a few former players, including

Indian great Sunil Gavaskar, called it "not ideal". However, India head coach Gautam Gambhir had termed it as "spicy" but overall good for Test cricket. "The series also emphasised the benefits of playing first-class cricket at major venues," Roach said. "It allows our curators to become more familiar with the different challenges that go into preparing wickets in different weather conditions, and also allows players to enter the Test team familiar with the conditions they will confront," he added. In 2023, the ICC revamped its pitch rating system, reducing it from six categories to four — very good, satisfactory, unsatisfactory and unfit.

Shastri wants Rohit and Kohli to play domestic cricket

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former India head coach Ravi Shastri wants the struggling Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli to get back to playing Ranji Trophy and feels the Test future of the two superstars is dependent on the hunger to maintain their excellence in the game. The repeated failures of the star Indian duo in the Border-Gavaskar trophy contributed to the visitors' series loss. India head coach Gautam Gambhir underlined the importance of domestic cricket following the loss and Shastri too feels Rohit and Kohli should return to playing Ranji Trophy even though the next series is in June.

"If there's a gap for them, they should go back and play some domestic cricket and see how it is. Because when you play Test match cricket for that length of time, it's important to play domestic cricket for two reasons," Shastri said during a conversation alongside Australian great Ricky Ponting on ICC Review. "One you are abreast with the current generation (and) you can contribute to that younger generation with your experience. And more importantly, you get to play spin more than you will ever play. "If you see, India's record in India on turning tracks is not the greatest. If you have quality spinners in the opposition,



they can trouble you. And they have troubled India," he added. Asked specifically on their Test

future, Shastri added: "I would leave that on them and would be closely tracking how they

fare in the upcoming games (ODIs against England, Champions Trophy).

"The hunger and desire as well is very important. One is 36 the other is 38 they would know how hungry they are. They will walk away if they think they have had enough," added Shastri. Kohli will be better served by a break: Ponting Former Australian captain Ponting has no shame in admitting that he carried on playing at the highest level longer than he should have. Back in 2022, Kohli had taken a month off from the game and that worked well for him. Ponting feels time has come for Kohli to get away from the game following his constant troubles outside the off-stump over the course of the five Test series Down Under.

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

SSA-31016/22/2022/PB-SSA

Mission Director, Samagra Shiksha Axom, Kahilipara, Guwahati-19, Assam invites bids through e-tendering process for supply of school uniform for class IX and X.

To participate in this bid process through e-procurement, bidder should have valid Digital Signature Certificate (DSC) and have to register in the portal <https://assamtenders.gov.in> by themselves.

The bidder who have downloaded the bid schedules containing the tender details, terms and conditions, from the website shall submit their tender on-line on the website <https://assamtenders.gov.in>, with proof of payment of non refundable tender fee of Rs. 15000.00 (Rupees fifteen thousand) only. The bid should be submitted online as per submission as per prescribed schedule date and time.

Sd/-Mission Director,
Samagra Shiksha Axom
Kahilipara, Guwahati-19

Janasanyog/CF/3188/24/9-Jan-25

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